00075478

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018

LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

VOLUME II.

LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

A Novel.

75478

BY

WILLIAM BLACK.

IN THREE VOLS.

VOL. II.

LONDON:
TINSLEY BROTHERS, 18, CATHERINE ST., STRAND.
1868.

(*All rights reserved.*)

LONDON:
WYMAN AND SONS, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET,
LINCOLN'S-INN FIELDS, W.C.

CONTENTS OF VOLUME II.

PAGE

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING DAUGHTER 9

CHAPTER II.

A SUPPER PARTY 23

CHAPTER III.

THE ROMANCE ENDS 45

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN 66

PAGE

CHAPTER V.

THE CHALLENGE 95

CHAPTER VI.

DREAMS BECOME POSSIBLE 125

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER OFFER 152

CHAPTER VIII.

COLD WATER 171

CHAPTER IX.

IN KENT 191

CHAPTER X.

THE CRISIS 208

CHAPTER XI.

THE PACT 227

PAGE

CHAPTER XII.

RECONCILIATION 244

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTHER MIGUEL 253

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED BY A SONG 269

CHAPTER XV.

GOODBYE! 288

LOVE OR MARRIAGE?

CHAPTER I.

THE MISSING DAUGHTER.

ONE morning James Glencairn lay in a long dreamlike doze, apparently thinking of many things. His breakfast was brought in to him; he did not touch it. By-and-by he murmured, as if he was speaking to his own spirit—

"No, I have not done my duty to my family. I have not aided God's gracious mercy to us by my own poor efforts. To-day I will turn over a new leaf."

For one or two evenings previous he had sat up, partially dressed, in that small room

of his; and had devoted these first hours of his recovery to a minute examination of his beloved *Salicaceæ*. This morning, pale and emaciated, he rose, dressed himself, and then hastily swallowed his cold breakfast. When he opened the door of his room, and passed into the parlour, his wife turned, with a little scream, to him, almost fancying that he was the victim of a delirious attack.

"What do you mean?" she asked.

"I am going to my business," he said, with a kindly smile lighting up the sad face and the deep grey eyes.

"You are mad, James. You cannot go. You are not able to go. What good will you do?"

"We must all do our best, my dear," he said, gently.

She replied, with a slight sneer,

"You should have said that when you

were well and able to do something—not now. It seems to me that we are hopelessly ruined—hopelessly."

"There is no such thing as hopeless ruin so long as God's care is over our heads," said her husband, gravely.

"That's all very well for the next world," replied the proud, cold woman; "but it does not prevent our starving in this."

"Our troubles are indeed bitter, Flora," he said, with that rare forbearance of his, "when they force you to talk in that way. And Fanny, where is she? She cannot be always so busy as she has been during the past few days. I am going to town, and I want her to go with me."

"She can't go with you."

"Why?"

Mrs. Glencairn saw there was no help for it; an explanation was necessary. She

turned to her husband, as if to brave his possible indignation, and said, in a cold, clear voice—

"Fanny is no longer in this house. She was dissatisfied with it, I suppose, and so she left. You need not look surprised, James; it is not the sort of house which could be very agreeable to a young girl, especially when she found her poverty becoming so marked as to attract the notice of those whom she had most to study — that is, the young men who wanted to marry her."

Perhaps this was the cruellest blow that the old man had yet received. The very idea that his daughter—the bright, warm-hearted, puzzling little creature who had wormed herself into his love, and was the very sunshine of his life—had been forced by his fatal negligence to leave her father's home, fell upon him with a painful horror.

For the moment he regarded his botanical studies as some species of horrible devil that had seduced him into crime. He did not for a moment seek to question the righteousness of her desertion. He was in fault; and he accepted his punishment meekly, sorrowfully, and silently.

"Where is she?" he said, in a broken voice.

Mrs. Glencairn saw that her disingenuous suggestion had told.

"Well," she said, carelessly, "she is not far off. The little hussy thought she would torment me at the same time, as she was leaving anyway. And so she left without saying a word."

"And you do not know where she is? And you have allowed her to remain away without making inquiry?" he asked, with a touch of indignation in his voice.

"I certainly know where she is. She had

not left two hours when Kate * saw her at the window of Mrs. Cleveland's house in Stockwell Road, and ran back to tell me. I suppose it was a part of her ill-temper to go to the house of a woman whom I hate, whom I haven't spoken to for a year, whom I wouldn't——baugh! I do not choose to speak of the creatures with whom I have been compelled to associate since I came to this neighbourhood."

"It was no ill-temper took the poor girl from her father's house to find refuge with a stranger," said Glencairn. "Ask Kate to fetch me my hat."

"What do you mean to do?"

"I will go and bring her back."

His wife did not accompany him. Probably she might have gone under other circumstances, and assisted him on this his first venture out of doors; but her spirit re-

* The maid-servant.

belled against the idea of appearing before Mrs. Cleveland as a supplicant for her daughter. On the other hand, she fancied that her husband would be only too ready to admit to her rival neighbour that this domestic shame had been caused entirely by himself; and so James Glencairn departed alone.

When he stepped out into the street, and saw the thin, wintry sunlight of October shimmering along the misty grey thoroughfares, and on the scantily-leaved poplars and birches of the gardens, a gleam of pleasure passed across his heart. He drew a long breath, as if to inhale the sweetness of this outside atmosphere, from which he had been so long debarred. The next moment, however, as he tried to walk along the pavement, he felt his whole frame tremble with weakness, and his legs were hardly able to support him. He

struggled on, however, with the help of the large brown staff that had been his companion in many a long ramble; although the cold wind pierced his thin clothes, and there grew a hectic warmth in his sallow, sad face. As he came near Clapham Road, he paused for a moment, and rested one of his hands on the railing beside him.

A young man came up—a frank young fellow—and said,

"You seem weak, sir; let me give you my arm, since we are going the same way."

"I thank you, sir—I thank you," said the old man, accepting the proffered kindness; "it is my first walk after some weeks' confinement to bed."

"But you know," said the young man, who spoke with all the confidence of a medical student, "you should not have

ventured out in a cold wind like this. Did your doctor give you liberty?"

"I have not asked the doctor to visit me these past few days; I was getting so rapidly well."

"You don't seem very well yet, sir," said the young man, who knew perfectly what was meant by 'not asking' a doctor to visit one; "and at any rate you should not have come out alone. I speak frankly, you know——"

"I thank you, sir," said James Glencairn. "We maun e'en do our best, though we make many mistakes. I had no prevision of this cold wind, or I might not have come. And I now thank you again for your kindness, for here we part company. I must go along that road there."

"But I will accompany you, if I can be of any service to you."

"Nay, nay, sir; a young man's time is

too valuable to be spent lightly; an old man s time is matter of concern to nobody. I bid ye a good morning, sir."

The house he sought was fortunately but a short distance off, and in course of time he managed to reach it. Frailly and slowly he made his way up the front steps, and knocked at the door. A very small girl appeared, carrying a baby in her arms.

"Is this Mrs. Cleveland's house?"

"Yes, sir."

"Then say to your mistress, my girl, that I want to see my daughter."

"What is your name, please, sir?"

"Glencairn."

The girl retired into the house for a few moments, and then returned. In the interval he had heard a woman talk very loudly and hotly; and, indeed, the message now delivered to him by the small girl was

considerably tempered and softened by that wise and practical young person.

"Missis says, sir, she don't know anythink—not anythink—about your daughter, and hasn't seen her for never so long."

Glencairn seemed scarcely to know the meaning of the words.

"My daughter has not been here? She has not been living here since she left our house? Where is she, then?"

"How should I know, sir? But she isn't here."

Therewith the little girl, considering her mission complete, shut the door; and Glencairn was left staring blankly along the mistily yellow street.

He made his way back to his home; and more than one passer-by turned to look at the man with the unutterably sad face, the stooping shoulders, and the feeble gait.

There was that in his very eyes which awoke sympathy.

"Fanny is not there, and has not been there," he said to his wife.

For the moment Mrs. Glencairn changed colour with absolute fright; her first thought being that Fanny had drowned herself in order to vex her with remorse. But the next moment she was up on her feet, proud, erect, and stern.

"The ungrateful girl will suffer for this when we find her; she shall repent her wickedness for many a day."

"Nay," said Glencairn, mildly, "that would be unfair. If her home has been made unbearable to her, the least we can do is to make it more comfortable, and be kind to her when she returns. It was not without much provocation that the poor girl left her father's house. But I have been most to blame, I know. It has been

my fault; and it will therefore lie wi' me to win her back by kindness."

"When you find her," said Mrs. Glencairn, sneeringly; though she was more alarmed than she chose to show.

"If you get me my top-coat, I will make my way into Oxford Street, and consult Mr. Morrison as to what we should do. I wanted to go there in any case; for, if God gives me health, I will try to improve our condition, Flora."

She went away to fetch the top-coat, but she did not reply with a single word to these faint entreaties for forgiveness which her husband was trying to make. She assisted him to put on his coat. Then he stood for a moment, as if scarcely wishing to ask for that which he hoped she would offer.

"Couldn't you come with me?" at last he ventured to hint.

She pointed with a weak smile to her dress.

"Is it my fault that I have been unable to quit the house for months in daylight? Would you have me go into town with a dress like that?"

He said nothing, but turned away, and went sadly and feebly down the narrow stair. Then he got into a 'bus, for he dreaded the expense of a cab; and so he reached his place of business in Oxford Street, where his presence was so much needed.

CHAPTER II.

A SUPPER PARTY.

ON the evening on which Helstone had met with his strange adventure by the seaside, Major Von Kirschenfeld had received his periodical batch of German correspondence. There was a letter from a member of the *Fortschritt* party in Berlin, which he and Marie discussed for some time; there were some papers regarding his estates in Westphalia, Pomerania, and elsewhere; and, finally, there was a collection of official and non-official Berlin journals, which gave more or less intelligible hints as to the method in

which Prussia was now dealing with her inveigled ally, Austria. The latter, of course, awoke all Kirschenfeld's patriotism; and he was soon marching up and down the apartment, wroth at a complication of circumstances which he dared not even hint to Marie when Charlie was present in the room.

Indeed the Major's pet scheme had not progressed so satisfactorily as he had anticipated from the first evening of Charlie's visit. The longer the young man remained with him, the more melancholy did he become—the longer grew the pauses between his efforts at work, in which he sat and dreamed, his back resolutely bent on the sea, his face turned wistfully towards London.

"That accursed city!" growled the Major to himself, in guttural German; "and the folly of modern life within it!

Life? It is not life. He knows no more of life than the ridiculous old fool in that play of Goethe's that was written to terrify children. Look at him, moonstruck, absent, eager to get back again to his wretchedness, and his poverty, and his love for that painted doll; while at hand, waiting for him, is all that a man requires to make his life manly and well. If he would only go out for a little soldiering, and discover what good meat and wine and a beautiful girl were! But——bah! this Canarienvogel will be the death of me!"

"Herr Major," said Marie, "I want you to sing 'Der Schweizer,' since you've been humming bits of it all day."

But the Major would not sing. He was in no humour for singing; besides, this ballad of the poor soldier who bids farewell to his comrades just before being

shot for deserting, always brought unsoldier-like tears to the old warrior's eyes.

"By-the-bye," said Marie, "Lord Cheveley says there is a similar ballad in French, in a story of Henri Mürger's; only in it, the poor soldier deserts to see his sweetheart, meets his captain on the way, fights a duel for his liberty, kills the captain, and then gives himself up to be shot. Isn't our ballad much finer?"

"Our ballad? So you are turned German girl, Marie? Yes, it is finer; and you shall sing it for me."

So she sat down, and sang the simple and plaintive music of the Switzer's story:—

"Zu Strasburg auf der Schanz,
Da ging mein Trauern an,
Das Alphorn hört ich drüben wohl anstimmen,
In's Vaterland musst' ich hinüber schwimmen,
Das ging nicht an."

"He was a brave fellow," said the Major warmly, striding up and down the room, with as much agitation as if he had been reading the tale out of the history of the '59 campaign.

"He could not help swimming across the river when he heard the alpen-horn; but when they caught him, and took him back, he made no resistance; he knew he had to die, and I know that he died like a brave soldier."

He turned suddenly to his daughter.

"Marie, you shall never marry a man who has not been a soldier. There is no man knows the value of a wife who has not been a soldier—do you hear?"

"Yes, Herr Major."

"But you pay no attention. You do not believe me. I say you deserve to be a soldier's wife—you have the heart of a soldier's wife. You would be the same to

him when he was away as when he was with you; and if they bring him to you dead, you go forward, you take his hand and kiss it, and you say only, 'He was my husband; and he died a brave man.' Your mother could have said that, Marie: you too."

"You might speak of something that would interest Charlie, papa," said Marie, simply.

Kirschenfeld turned with an impatient look, which had almost a touch of scorn in it.

"He is an artist. Who can interest an artist without being a tree or a rock?"

"An artist is more useful than a soldier, Herr Major," said Marie. "Charlie could be a soldier if he liked; but how many soldiers did you ever know, papa, who could be an artist?"

"Charlie become a soldier? He has

the strength for it, and the figure for it; but he has not the heart for it. He would rather handle a—wie heiszt das?—a hair-pencil than a rifle."

Charlie said nothing; but, with a smile on his face, he pointed to a silver cup which stood on a small table in the corner of the drawing-room. He had won the trophy about eight months before at a competition of the volunteer company to which he belonged; and his name was written with profuse scrawls on the oval side of the glittering prize. Kirschenfeld turned to it, and joined in the laugh with which Marie greeted his discomfiture.

"Listen to me, Junge," he said, gravely, to Charlie. "You know your English drill. You may change your mind of what I said to you about going with Preussen; and I will tell you now, in a short moment, all the difference there

is between that drill and yours, and the words of command, and how you know a first from a second lieutenant, and a uhlan from a jäger, and a guard-corps man from the ordinary regiments, and so further And you, Marie, you talked of the lime-light this evening; now you go and prepare it, and by-and-by we come to you when we are ready."

Kirschenfeld's military lecture lasted longer than he had anticipated; but when he had finished, Charlie and he went up to the tower. As the reader already knows, they had only been casting about the glare of the limelight for a few minutes when it fell upon the prostrate figure of Helstone. It was Charlie who first perceived the ghastly white face gleaming up out of the darkness.

"My God! what is that?" he ex-

claimed, in a tone which startled the Major and Marie.

"Was gibt es da?" cried the former, who always broke into German when he was particularly excited. "'S ist unglaublich! Ein Mann—und todt? Was soll geschehen? Komm mit!"

He rushed downstairs and into the open air, bearing in his hand a lamp, the light of which was immediately blown out. Charlie, begging Marie to remain within doors, followed; and as he overtook the Major, who had stumbled on in the faint starlight, they arrived about the same moment by the side of Helstone.

He by this time had partially come to himself; and as he was about to rise, bewildered and trembling, he confronted the two men who were now regarding him. The moment he caught sight of them, he uttered a slight cry, and tried

to draw himself back, as if he feared that they, too, were spirits. But now Charlie's eyes, grown accustomed to the darkness, recognised the known face.

"Helstone!" he cried, in amazement, as he put out his hand, and assisted him to rise.

Helstone took the proffered hand, and involuntarily gripped it with a firm, nervous, clasp as though to make sure it was real flesh and blood; and then, without letting go his hold, he looked shudderingly around into the darkness.

"What's the matter with you?" said Charlie. "Were you ill? Why are you here?"

Helstone brought all his energy of will to bear him up and restore his composure; but his strong mental agitation was visible in the deadly pallor of his face and in the

trembling of his hands. He tried to laugh.

"Nothing but an attack of my old malady," he said. "Don't you remember? But don't let us speak of that. What are you doing here?"

"I am living here—with this gentleman, Major von Kirschenfeld."

The Major and Helstone bowed; and the latter took advantage of the momentary pause to steal a quick glance along the edge of the cliff.

"That is my house there," said Kirschenfeld to Helstone. "If you are yet not quite well, will you come in?"

"Gladly—gladly," said Helstone. "The night has become suddenly cold—change in the atmosphere;—something of that sort, I dare say, has provoked the faintness that overcame me. But—but I feel much better."

"Are you living down here, then?" said Charlie.

"Yes; at the house along the road there. I was returning home when I —when I was seized with this 'ridiculous faintness. Who would have thought to meet you here!"

"Have you been long away from London?"

"Some days."

"And we have been living almost within a stone's throw of each other without knowing it."

Helstone thought of the horrible volcano on the edge of which Fanny had during that time been standing, and said nothing. He resolved that she should not pass another day in such a dangerous neighbourhood.

He would rather not have gone into the house, for he was unwilling to show the

paleness which he knew would be visible on his face; but he dreaded Charlie's offering to accompany him home, if he returned at once. So he passed into Kirschenfeld's drawing-room.

He was introduced to Marie, who could scarcely help regarding him with a superstitious fear.

"But for my cousin here," said Charlie, "we should not have seen you. It was her limelight apparatus which discovered you; and, to tell you the truth, we thought you were dead."

"I am doubly ashamed of this absurd malady of mine," said Helstone to Marie, "since it must have frightened you so much."

"Faith, I don't see the absurdity of it," said Charlie. "It looks to me rather a serious thing."

"Not at all, not at all," said Helstone,

who seemed to deprecate any further talk on the subject. "It is not an injurious bodily weakness, but a stupid habit of the imagination, which is very rightly punished by physical suffering."

Kirschenfeld could not understand these nice distinctions; and seemed to regard as a semi-lunatic a man who could be thankful that one part of his nature was punished for the faults of the other part.

They played a little whist, and Helstone endeavoured to become deeply interested in the game, though his hands yet trembled so that he could scarcely hold the cards, and though he made the most atrocious blunders in playing. Fortunately for the peace of the party, he had Marie for his partner; and instead of becoming savage at his mistakes, she endeavoured to palliate them, and

suggest theories to atone for them. At the end of the rubber, he said to her,

"Now, Miss Kirschenfeld, confess that I played very badly."

"Well, you did," she said, with a smile.

"And that you were vexed with me."

"Not at all. You have not been able to play your best to-night; but another time we may beat our opponents."

"You are very charitable," he said, looking towards her with a smile which Charlie did not like.

Kirschenfeld now pressed his guest to remain to supper; but Helstone was evidently unwilling to stay.

"Have you any friends staying with you over there, or live you alone?" he asked.

"I live quite alone," said Helstone.

"Then why not have supper with us?

You can remain here all night, if you have displeasure at going across in the dark."

"I will stay to supper, then," said Helstone; "but I must go home to-night all the same."

The genial influence of a little wine, of the bright lights, and cheerful conversation reanimated Helstone. He had far more pleasure in such a pleasant little supper party than Charlie; for, in the first place, he had no clouded future hanging before him; and, in the second, he knew and appreciated the quality of Kirschenfeld's wine.

But the Major and he were at once thrown into a vehement discussion: that is to say, all the discussion was on Helstone's side, and all the vehemence on the Major's.

"Patriotism is a barbaric sentiment," said the former, when the Major had been

preaching about his beloved Prussia. "A Frenchman is as much my brother as a man who lives in the next street to me. Why should I espouse the cause of the one against the other? I would just as soon have been born in France, or in Bavaria, as in England; and why should I hate people who have been born there, or become possessed with the absurd notion that it is better for the world that England should rule the world? Why——"

And here the Major broke in furiously, tumbling about his English and German indiscriminately, and appealing to Charlie about the principles concerned in the war between the Cavaliers and the Roundheads.

"Why," said Helstone, "that is true enough; but if the hard toasts which the Cavaliers drank had been half as hard as

the Roundheads' pikes, Charles need not have been beheaded."

"My father," said Marie to Helstone, "will have Charlie to go to the war against Austria. But Prussia and England might be enemies; and how can my cousin, if he has patriotism, go with the possible enemy of his country?"

"Little traitor!" said Kirschenfeld, "you give him an excuse for staying at home, because you know he wishes to stay at home."

"It is a fine profession, that of a soldier," said Helstone, "if it were not so very barbaric. They have a quick death and a merry one; and if they die on the field, they have all the sympathy of their fellow-men. Yet why should they have it? All the men who fought at Jena are now dead: why should we pity only those who died at Jena?"

"Why?" said Kirschenfeld; "because they had to leave their wives and children before old age made them indifferent to them."

"So much the better," said Helstone. "But no soldier should have a wife."

Kirschenfeld shook his bushy white hair, and pulled his moustache with anger.

"MIR müssen Sie das nicht sagen! I say it is only a soldier deserves to have a fine wife, a noble wife. Such a woman deserves to have a husband who is alive, who knows her value; who is not half a woman himself with living on novels-reading, and sentiment, and town-life——"

"Herr Major," said Marie, "that is Mr. Helstone's glass you hold in your hand."

"I ask you a thousand pardons, sir," said Kirschenfeld; "but you must not speak so of the soldiers."

"Oh, I only mentioned a theory," said Helstone, laughing. "I never knew any soldiers, except a young ensign whom I used to meet occasionally at a friend's house in London. Our acquaintanceship was broken off through an inadvertent saying of mine, for which I am now heartily sorry. He was once, at this friend's table, very angry with me for suggesting a reason why so many military men lisped. 'Why,' he said, 'you'll be able to explain to me, also, why my head is round?' 'Certainly,' said I, 'for everything soft naturally takes a spherical form!' He never forgave me."

"Then he was a fool," said Kirschenfeld; adding, as he stroked his white moustache and beard, "you cannot say anything of me which shall offend me."

"My dear sir," said Helstone, "if I continued experimenting in this way on

every man whose acquaintanceship I made, I should be like the children who are constantly pulling up the seeds they have sown to see if they've taken root."

During this short meal, and after it, Charlie could not forbear noticing the striking resemblance borne by Helstone's manner on this occasion to that which he had shown on being introduced to the Glencairns. He could not help remarking, also, the great dissimilarity between the behaviour of Fanny and Marie when exposed to the brilliant fire of Helstone's pleasantries and attention. Fanny had pretended not to hear; but had stolen sly glances at the hero of the evening. Marie sat grave and courteous, replying frankly to any observation of Helstone's, but maintaining towards him an indifference which was only revealed by her politeness.

At length Helstone bade good-night to his entertainers; and Charlie accompanied him home—now that he knew there was no fear of Fanny being visible. He promised to see Charlie the next morning; but he inwardly resolved to hurry Fanny out of the neighbourhood at the earliest possible hour.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROMANCE ENDS.

WHETHER it was the natural reaction after the violent excitement he had undergone on the previous evening, or whether it was the effect of Kirschenfeld's wine, Helstone did not get up so soon as he had anticipated.

Fanny, on the other hand, who had retired to rest at an early hour, was up betimes. She saw, from her companion's boots being in the passage, that he was still in bed; and not wishing to disturb him, she slipped quietly past the door of his room, and went outside. She passed

downstairs, and went into Mrs. Jewsbury's kitchen, where she found Sarah busy in preparing breakfast.

"My brother is not up yet, Sarah," she said; "so you need not hurry. But I will take, if you please, a little piece of bread and some milk in the meantime."

Sarah put the things before her, and looked on while the dainty fingers cut a tiny morsel off the big loaf, and poured out a cupful of fresh milk. Fanny then went out, and proposed to herself to take a walk down to the seaside before returning to breakfast.

It was a dull, rich-coloured morning, with a thin fog lying over the meadows, through which the cold bronzed sunshine faintly struggled. Out at sea the vapour became in appearance thicker, and hung in a deep orange cloud around the horizon.

Fanny found that the narrow brown path leading down to the shore was damp; and not unfrequently she paused to look at a particularly bright dewdrop that shot forth its ray of clear blue or pink light from the circular leaf of the "lady's-mantle," or to admire some threads of a spider's web encrusted with lustrous jewels.

She began to look out for the more beautiful of these frail works of art, and finding a particularly lambent web, that stretched from a bramble-bush to the neighbouring hedge, she stretched out her gloved finger to see whether she could shake off these glancing diamonds, while with the other hand she held back her dress from touching the wet bramble-bush. As she stood in this position, she heard footsteps almost close upon her, turned her head, and saw——

Charlie, who had been watching with an artist's delight the pretty posture of this young girl, whom as yet he did not recognize. When she turned her head—when their eyes met—she started back, as if to defend herself from a sudden danger. He, on the other hand, thinking of nothing but the sweet shock of pleasure that the mere sight of her gave him, ran forward eagerly——

"Fanny—my darling!"

There was that in the terror of her eyes that recalled him. He almost staggered backward as he thought of his meeting with Helstone on the preceding evening; his hand fell to his side, and he said,

"Fanny, what are you doing here?"

Now she was perfectly calm and self-reliant; and by a mere effort of will she had forced resolution instead of fear into her eyes.

She looked him straight in the face.

"I will tell you," she said, in a cold, harsh voice. "But mind you, Charlie, there is one thing I never forgave in my life—suspicion. I will tell you what I am doing here—I will tell you anything you choose to ask; but, if I feel that you suspect me, or doubt my word, then we may bid goodbye to each other once and for ever."

"Fanny, why should you speak in that way?" he asked in remonstrance.

"Why did you hang back when you were going to shake hands with me?" she responded; "why did you glance up towards the house in which you know Helstone is at this moment? Why? Because you suspected me. Very well. Let me go."

Bewildered, not knowing what he did, he stepped aside into the wet grass, and allowed her to pass on. The unexpected

meeting, and the wild, incomprehensible turn that things had taken, seemed to have paralysed him.

Then he went after her, and laid his hand on her arm.

"Fanny!"

She turned upon him, almost savagely.

"What do you want? Are you not ashamed to talk publicly with a woman whom you suspect? If I were a man, and thought as you do, I should have more pride."

"Fanny, I haven't given you cause to speak with this bitterness. I don't suspect you."

"I *know* that you did suspect me—two minutes ago; and that is enough. We cannot be friends any more—indeed, I do not see any reason why we should be friends."

"You do not?" he said; and he fixed

his eyes with a sad entreaty upon that sweet, too-beautiful face.

"No, I do not," she said, but she had bent her eyes upon the ground. "You know why you wish to be friends with me—because you wish me to become your wife. But I will never marry a man who has a grain of suspicion in his nature—I know too well what it would bring about after marriage."

"Then you will never marry at all," said Charlie, driven to despair.

"Very well," she said, calmly.

"Fanny, you are unreasonable. You should not expect anybody to be perfect. I *did* think of Helstone being here when I saw you—who could help it? But I didn't suspect you—if I had suspected you, do you think I would be speaking to you now? And I do not suspect you;—give me your hand."

By this time they had both reached the edge of the cliffs; and though she had been slowly walking on in front of him, or by his side, she was now forced to confront him. He held out his hand.

"No," she said, firmly, drawing back, "not until you have heard what I have got to say."

Then, with her eyes fixed upon him, and her face cold and resolute, she said:

"I came here with Mr. Helstone. For five days we have been here, both living in that house. We have been together every day, from breakfast-time to supper-time. And, finally, neither my father nor my mother knows where I am. *Now* I will shake hands with you if you like; but remember that if we part now without shaking hands, our friendship is over in this world, for I will never, so long as I live, speak one word more to you."

Was it not a cruel test? The lips of the young man trembled with the pain he was undergoing.

"Will you tell me that you have done nothing wrong?"

"No," she said, coldly. "If you believe me capable of doing wrong, it is time we should separate."

"Fanny!" he cried, clasping her hand in both his own, "I can believe no ill of you!"

She was evidently softened by this burst of confidence. She looked for a moment in his face, as if to find proof there of his sincerity, and then she said,

"It is as well we two have not parted to-day without becoming friends. There are things that the pride of a girl will not allow her to explain, and such a meeting as we had this morning is one of them; but now I can explain."

He had drawn off his gloves, which were warm winter ones; and he took each of her hands in his, and drew his large gloves over her small fingers.

"One needs two pair of gloves on such a morning," he said, bashfully. "These kid gloves are chilling things."

"But you have none at all," she said.

He did not mind that much. He placed her right hand on his left arm, and while with *his* right hand he held it there cosily, he led her gently along the path by the cliffs, himself walking delightedly, for her sake, through the wet weeds and brackens.

"You can tell me as much as you please, or as little," he said to her. "After all, I cannot help trusting you in everything."

"You should not try to help trusting anybody," she said; "there is too much suspicion in the world, and who knows what harm it does? And indeed, Charlie,

I should not like to be suspected by you. If you had left me this morning as you seemed inclined to do, I should never have spoken to you again—never. I should have gone home again; told no one; and I should have spoken of you coldly and distantly as an indifferent acquaintance. But *then* I should have been very unhappy."

He looked down into her face, tenderly; and almost hoped she would spare herself the pain of making further admissions. But Fanny was bent on making him regret the momentary indecision of which he had been guilty by showing him the kindness he was so nearly chasing away for ever from his life.

"After all," she continued, meditatively, "we have known each other for so long a time! and it would be hard to part now, when I have so much need of friends. And now, Charlie, since you have proved your-

self such a true friend, I will tell you why I am here. You know—for mamma told you — that Mr. Helstone sent me a letter——"

A look of pain passed over Charlie's face. With the mention of that fatal letter she had shattered the enchanted mirror into which he had been looking. The whole black past had been recalled—the circumstances attending his leaving London, and the dreary time he had spent down here.

She saw all this in a moment; and, with scarcely a pause, continued:

"——a letter talking to me in a manner for which he certainly had no authority from me. However, what he wrote to me did not matter; for neither one's feelings nor intentions are likely to be altered by a sheet or two of paper. But in the letter he seems to have given deadly offence to

mamma, as I learnt from himself afterward; he was forbidden to come to the house, and his letters to mamma or myself were returned unopened. Am I tiring you?"

"Not at all."

"That was between Mr. Helstone and mamma, and I am sure it was a matter of indifference to me how the quarrel ended. But mamma immediately began—Helstone being beyond her reach—to visit her anger upon me. I dared scarcely speak a word to her, for the answers she gave me. Then I was a complete prisoner. I was not allowed to leave the house; and I had absolutely no one with whom to speak—no one. How I wearied for your coming, Charlie! I did not know you were out of town until afterwards, when Mr. Helstone told me, though he did not know where you had gone. And how I began to hate

you, Charlie, for not coming; for I thought you were angry with that foolish letter, and proud, so that you would not come to see me. I listened when any one came to the door, and asked myself, 'Is this Charlie at last?' and then I grew to despise myself for being so anxious, and to dislike you for making me think so meanly of myself."

"Oh, if I had but known!" thought Charlie.

"What was I to do? I was no longer a child. My mother had no right to treat me like that. Very well, I resolved to leave the house; and Mr. Helstone very kindly took the trouble to come all the way here and take these lodgings for me; and he stays in the same house himself. I saw you knew that by the glance you directed to the house. But how did you discover we were here?"

"I had no idea you were here. I—— well, I met Helstone last night, and he took supper with us—at that large house there, down by the cliffs. I accompanied him home, too; and yet he never spoke a word about your being there."

"Why, don't you see, Charlie, he did not wish to subject me to the ignominy of having to make the explanation I have just made."

"If that is an ignominy," he said, rather roughly—for in spite of himself he rebelled against all this chicanery and deceit—"it is one that most people have to undergo who place themselves in a false position."

"I have not placed myself in a false position," she said, with a tinge of her old haughtiness coming back. "If I had all this to do over again, I should not alter

my conduct in one bit, unless I had the offer of a pleasanter companion."

The last words she uttered in a sly way, looking quaintly up into Charlie's face. But he did not observe the delicate flattery; and asked,

"And what do you consider a pleasant companion?"

"Oh," she said, with an assumed indifference, "if he had a yacht, for instance, with a very snug little cabin, he would have an advantage; or if he were a soldier —I'm very fond of soldiers."

"You have a capacity for being fond of everybody," he said, almost angrily.

"Except those who insult me," she replied, indignantly drawing her hand from his arm.

But this was one of those trifling little quarrels which Charlie knew well how to manage.

"If you are going," said he, "you may at least leave me my gloves."

She turned, looked at him for a moment, then there was a bright laugh came into her lustrous blue eyes, and she took his arm again.

"I have spoiled you dreadfully," she said, "and I am beginning to suffer for it. Will you come and take breakfast with us?"

"When I met you, I was on my way to ask Helstone to dine with the Kirschenfelds. Yes, I will breakfast with you."

When they approached the house, Helstone was sitting in the front room, looking out towards the sea, apparently waiting for Fanny. When he saw her approach, hanging on Charlie's arm, a thrill of alarm passed through him; but immediately he perceived that they were on the best of terms, and that she was

laughing at something her companion had said.

"What a shame it is," said Helstone, with involuntary admiration, "that a woman like this should have been born in such a sphere. If she were now the wife of an ambitious French minister, she would put her husband on the throne of France within five years."

Notwitstanding all Fanny's diplomacy, however, the breakfast was rather an embarrassing meal. The addition of a third person seemed to throw the light of the outer world into this little conspiracy; and each of them felt how very singular was his and her position, and, shorn of its idealism, how awkward it might become.

Helstone also was *distrait* and uncomfortable. He fancied that this solitary life by the sea-coast had again developed that

mental weakness which had reached such a horrible climax on the preceding evening; and he longed to be back in the social whirl of London.

Charlie was in the greatest alarm lest the Major should discover his mistress in the position she now occupied, and make that an excuse for vilifying her publicly and privately. He also was very anxious that she should return at once.

Fanny herself was not unwilling to reenter her father's house, if only Charlie would come and make things pleasant for her. All the romance seemed to have been blown away from the little adventure since her meeting with Charlie; and she began to long for the security and sense of safety that even the harshest mother might afford.

No one revealed his or her private motive; but an open compromise was come

to by Helstone suggesting that Fanny's mamma had been sufficiently punished.

"And if you like," said Charlie, "I will go with you when you return home. Your mother is kind to me just now; and I dare say she will be very glad to see you back, Fanny."

"If it were for papa, I don't think I should go back at all," said she, proudly.

Charlie returned to Kirschenfeld's house.

"Herr Major," he said, in his best German (for the old regulations were yet in force), "I must go up to London by the one o'clock train. Will you let your man carry my things over to the station?"

"He will drive you over."

"But," said Charlie, who knew that, in that case, Kirschenfeld and his daughter would also go to the station, "I have promised to walk there with Mr. Helstone."

"As you please."

Charlie packed up his easel and canvases, sent them off by the groom, bade goodbye to Marie and her father, and then walked over to meet Helstone and Fanny. He did not regret much leaving Wrexhill; and yet it was with a certain sadness that he stepped into the carriage. He was scarcely at peace with himself; there was a dim unrest at his heart that he tried to banish by being very attentive to Fanny. He tried hard to think no more of the pleasant house at Wrexhill, and the quiet life there, and the calm of the sea that used to comfort and soothe him through the long days.

CHAPTER IV.

THE RETURN.

DURING the journey from Wrexhill to London, Helstone was preoccupied and silent. The novelty of the morning had worn off, and his mind began to revert to the scene of the preceding night.

It is to be imagined that there can be few more horrible sensations than that of a man's suddenly discovering himself to be the victim of a terrible disease which is likely to embitter and shorten his life, especially if that disease be of a kind to defy medical skill. Helstone, who re-

garded these successive visitations as mere evidence of mental ailment, saw his whole future life beclouded with this haunting dread. He lay back in his seat, communing with himself.

"And if I am insane upon one point," he said, "will not madness sooner or later envelop my brain? If I had only been born a clodhopper, or a brainless grocer, or a Scotch shepherd! But then I should have been attacked with one of the commoner kinds of insanity, such as Calvinism, which might have made my life much more wretched."

Then he said aloud to his companions, "Don't you think Calvinism a disease—a sort of religious kleptomania—a morbid covetousness already transferred to the next world?"

Fanny and Charlie were laughing at some children who had cheered as the

train passed. The former turned round, with big, wondering eyes.

"Why do you say such dreadful things, Mr. Helstone? You know you ought not to speak to me in that way, when my father isn't here to set you right."

"Your father is not a Calvinist," said Helstone, with a smile.

"I'm sure I don't know," said Fanny; "but what you said sounded wrong."

So Helstone relapsed into his meditations on madness; and as madness is the evil from which of all others a man is most eager to fly, he exerted all his ingenuity to prove to himself that he was sane. And finally, as he had done before, he found a loophole of escape in blaming these apparitions upon either a disordered digestion or a nervous weakness of the eyes.

"As soon as I get to London," he said

to himself, "I will go to Guy's and see Dr. Blake."

Consequently, when they arrived in London, Charlie received and accepted the duty of taking Fanny home to her parents, an arrangement which secretly satisfied every one of the three consenting parties. Charlie was proud of his charge. He was intoxicated, besides, with the sudden renewal of this delicious friendship with Fanny; and she, who knew so well how to be kind to him, lost no opportunity of convincing him that in having doubted her for a moment he had wronged the gentlest and sweetest and most beautiful creature on earth.

At London Bridge Station Charlie allowed his own baggage to lie in the cloak-room, and got a cab for Fanny and himself. She glanced wonderingly around her as she came outside, and heard once

more the roar and din of London; and furtively she stole a glance at the hotel in which she and Helstone had breakfasted on the morning of her flight.

Then they rolled away towards Clapham.

"I am glad to get home again," she said; "and yet I am so afraid."

"Why?"

"I have done no wrong, and yet I feel as if I had done wrong."

"Oh, nonsense!" said Charlie.

He would have defended her against the world. He would have declared that it was impossible she could do wrong. He could not have explained, with Helstone's ingenuity, why she had done no wrong; but there was a fine, convincing fulness in his assertion that was of far more value. Argument has never been the province of cavaliers.

At length they arrived opposite the

house, and Fanny, rather nervously, got out of the cab, while Charlie turned to pay the driver. She looked down the street, and then she ventured to cast her eyes up to the house. Who was that frail old man standing on the top of the steps, the door open before him, he looking towards her as if unable to recognise her? She opened the little iron gate, ran up the steps, and the next moment her father's arms were round her, and her face was hid away from the light. There, in the thin sunlight of Clapham, in the face of its cold respectability, this scene took place; and big tears rolled down old Glencairn's cheeks.

"You have come back to me, my girl, after all?—after I sent you away from the house!"

Fanny looked up in her father's face, as he led her into the hall.

"You, papa? It was not on your account I left. I left because mamma was so unkind to me that I could not bear it; and because——"

"Hush, my girl," said Glencairn, kissing her gravely; "you must not say anything against your mother, now you have come back. We will speak no more of what has happened."

At this moment Charlie came up the steps and entered the house. Glencairn shook hands with him.

"So the runaway appealed to you, Charlie?" he said. "Come in, lad; and help us to get back into our old footing."

So the party walked upstairs into the parlour, where they knew Mrs. Glencairn awaited them. Fanny was in much alarm, but resolute to fight for herself should there be occasion.

Charlie entered first, and went forward with his blithe, frank smile to bid good-morning to Mrs. Glencairn. She rose, and he saw that she was slightly pale, but fixed and proud.

She shook hands with him.

Then she turned to Fanny, who stood hesitatingly in the middle of the room.

"Oh, you are there, Fanny!" she said, coldly, and with a little affected surprise. "Hadn't you better go upstairs and take off your things?"

From that moment there was no mention made or recognition taken of her having been away. Mrs. Glencairn was too proud to speak of it to any one; Mr. Glencairn was truly anxious to have the trouble smoothed down and forgotten. So anxious was he, too, to shield the girl from future unpleasantness, that he meekly bore the imputation of having forced her

to leave because of the poverty of the house. He believed, from what Fanny had said, that her mother's severity was the true cause; but he knew that any recurrence to this painful subject would only embitter the cold, stern woman against her child.

So Fanny was welcomed home again in this negative fashion. The reader, who knows the incidents of her absence, may fancy that her father and mother ought to have been disquieted; and that in public estimation the girl's character must have suffered. But who knew of these things except Charlie? and had not that blind trust of his rendered him impervious to the meaner influences of suspicion? To look into those big, child-like eyes was to believe what they said; he had looked, and believed; and was ready to go on believing with a fervour

and simplicity which were almost an unconscious worship.

When she returned, she sat down on a chair near her father, and in rather an embarrassed silence listened to the conversation going on. That conversation was about the weather.

Despite all Charlie's generosity, he was selfish enough to wish himself five miles away from his present position. It is impossible to conceive the dead-weight of awkwardness and embarrassment which hung over this little party, until Mrs. Glencairn relieved it by some cutting inuendoes. Charlie made wild rushes at all sorts of topics; and finally hit upon what otherwise he would have left during an eternity of silence unmentioned—the dull story of a neighbouring lady whose husband had, by his stupidity, achieved their common ruin.

"It is a good thing to be a woman," said Charlie, at his wit's end for something to say, "for she has always the theoretical right to be dependent on somebody, and if she becomes poor it is no disgrace to her."

"I thought poverty ceased to be disgraceful over eighteen hundred years ago," said James Glencairn mildly.

"And I," said Mrs. Glencairn, with some spirit, "entirely fail to see the advantage a woman has in that respect; for a man is independent, can make his own way without being dragged down, and if he does fail he has the satisfaction of knowing that he himself is to blame. A woman is powerless; she suffers for other people's faults; and is supposed to be very wicked if she complains. And what is left to most of us

than the pleasure—and a pretty pleasure it is!—of complaining?"

Glencairn said nothing: what could he say? But this bold avowal of her domestic miseries to a mere acquaintance stung him into thinking of a project which had for some days back been floating through his brain. He rose abruptly, crossed the room, and entered his study.

He sat down on a chair, and buried his face in his hands. In that position he remained for several minutes, and when he rose his face was pale and determined. He advanced to the folding doors of his herbarium and opened them.

"There is a life's labour there," he said, as he cast his eyes down the well-filled shelves.

He stretched his hand out, and lifted a double sheet of white paper from the top

shelf. Down at the corner this sheet was marked with the generic name "Ranunculus," and inside, carefully fixed upon a series of blue sheets of paper, and labelled with the spot and date of capture, were the various species of the genus. He turned them over.

"There is more than a life's labour," he thought to himself, "there are the the recollections and memories of a life-time. This water-crowfoot—well, it was a sad afternoon I carried that home from Bardowie Loch;—I was young, I was not satisfied with my happiness, and she and I quarrelled, as if there was not plenty of quarrelling to be reaped in our life; as if we could afford to throw away one of those afternoons—they were soon to be taken from us altogether, God help me! —and I went home one way, and she another; and I knew she was praying for

me to come to her, and I would not yield—no, not for three days. Let me see, was it four or five Saturday afternoons after that they came to me and told me to go quick and see her?—and there was a bit of honeysuckle in her white hand, as it lay on the white coverlet;—and then that Sunday night, when all the people were in the next room—and when I went in she began to cry, and turned away her head, and said she could bid goodbye to them all but me;—and I thought that surely God and I, between us, could keep her in life—for what good could her death do to the world, at this time when the air was sweet and the light was sweet?—and at last she held out her poor, thin hand, and said 'Dinna forget me quite, Jamie!' God help me, but I canna sell my plants, for she gathered the maist o' them wi' her ain hands!"

The last few words he groaned out, using the old Scotticisms he had almost forgotten, as he reverently closed the white sheet and placed it back among its fellows.

"But then," he considered, "I have some valuable genera with which I might part. Here, for instance — how many institutions in England have a collection of *Juncaginaceæ* like this?"

He pulled out the parcel of sheets, and opened the white cover. The first object that met his gaze seemed to cause him some powerful emotion. He raised the frail sheet, touched it with his lips, and replaced it. There was the handwriting of a girl upon it.

He turned to the window, and let his eyes fall, quite unconsciously, on the rows of ferns within the large glass case. There was a sad, weary look upon his

face—the look of a man contemplating a hopeless future. There is nothing more beautiful, we are told, than the spectacle of a good man struggling with misfortune —beautiful, that is, to every one but the good man.

When he re-entered the parlour, unconscious that the expression of his face had singularly changed, he found Charlie about to leave. The young man had been fairly demoralized by the superhuman effort to become the conversational link between mother and daughter, and was glad to get an excuse to go.

"And I," said Mr. Glencairn, "will go with you as far as Oxford Street, if you're going home."

"You, papa!" cried Fanny. "You do not seem to be fit to go out at all."

"I was in the City yesterday, my girl," he said; "and this morning I

walked out for a newspaper, the maid being busy."

"If I had been in," said Fanny, boldly, "you should not have gone out, papa."

"You are always so studious of your parents' feelings, Fanny!" said her mother, with a sneer; and Fanny crimsoned violently.

"You will at least put on a top-coat," said Charlie, who could scarcely restrain his indignation at the cruel back-handed blow dealt to his gentle mistress.

Glencairn did so, and they went out. Fanny looked into Charlie's eyes as he passed into the lobby, and there was a mute thankfulness in them which touched him. When they were at the hall-door, she took his hand in hers, pressed it, and said,

"I will never forget your kindness."

Charlie went away prouder and richer than an emperor.

As they walked round towards Clapham Road to get the Oxford Street omnibus (neither of them being able to afford a cab), Mr. Glencairn asked Charlie concerning the circumstances of Fanny's absence; and the young man, glad to have the occasion of vindicating the milk-white purity of his mistress's character, gave her father an assuring and satisfactory narrative of the whole affair. James Glencairn, therefore, as well as Charlie, believed that Fanny's running away from home was a mere girlish imprudence; and both were without a suspicion of Helstone having suggested the trip as a mutual pleasure excursion.

Then the old man began to talk to his companion of the straits in which he now found himself.

"I am afraid our affairs are past recovery, and I fear that it has all come to

pass through my folly. And you, Charlie; you are young—you have your course in life to choose—do not heed what I may have said to you of the value of poverty, and of that independence of worldly welfare which I once thought we ought to cultivate. I am repenting late—who knows if I shall ever repent? But, at any rate, a man with a wife and child must consider them, and yield to them; and I'm afraid many people can never be satisfied with this world unless it gives them money. We have not all the same views of things, and my wife, as you know, is a practical woman, and she finds herself depressed——"

He fell into a reverie, which lasted some time. They were now in the omnibus.

"There is not much real trust in God's love nowadays. We are like a spider on

the edge of a leaf, fearful of dropping to the earth, unconscious that God's great hand is everywhere beneath."

"But are your business affairs so very bad?" Charlie inquired.

"They are enough to distress me without my needing to distress you by talking of them," said the old man.

"Could I not be of any service to you?" he ventured to ask.

"I have had enough of service," said Mr. Glencairn, with a smile. "Your friend, Mr. Helstone, was kind enough to go daily to my place, and perhaps he did some good; but all at once he ceased going, and Mr. Morrison, fancying that I did not wish to be disturbed, and waiting for Helstone's return, allowed a bill almost to become due without making the necessary preparations to meet it. I am going to-day to have it renewed; if

I cannot get that done, I have no idea what to do next."

"Is it heavy?"

"Very heavy for a man who has got no money, and no means of borrowing any."

"Could you not borrow it from Helstone? He has some money besides his ordinary income."

"Charlie," said Mr. Glencairn, kindly; "I should only borrow money from a friend. Mr. Helstone is a very worthy man, and a respectable and honourable man, doubtless, but I could never borrow money from him."

"Well, sir," said Charlie, "in a week or two I hope to have earned a few pounds——"

"My boy, don't speak any more of that. I have done you enough mischief by talking to you in the way I've done;

the wisest thing I can do now is to recall everything I have said, and counsel you, if you would lead a pleasant life, to neglect all things in heaven and earth for the making of money. Think of nothing else, dream of nothing else; sacrifice everything—your whole youth, and middle-age—to attain it——"

"And then, when I am old, shall I enjoy it?" asked Charlie, with a smile; for he detected the sort of rebellious sarcasm in the old man's tone.

"Why not? What better enjoyment can old age have than that of being respected; and how will you be respected if you are poor?"

"I could be rich now, if I chose," said Charlie, and there was something of sadness, as well as of pride, in his tone.

He was proud of his allegiance to Fanny; he was sad to think that he and she to-

gether might be sorely tried by the incomprehensible injustice of fortune.

"And why do not you choose?"

"Because I have no wish to sell myself, even for six hundred a year."

"It must be a very powerful reason," said Mr. Glencairn, gravely, "to give a man the right to refuse six hundred a year —especially a young man like you, who could both benefit yourself and others so much by it. I hope you are not committing an error, Charlie, out of some mistaken feeling of honour."

Charlie was on the point of confessing himself, when, fortunately, he paused. It would have been nothing to tell Mr. Glencairn of his love for Fanny, which had certainly never been a forbidden subject between them; but how could he throw the slightest slur upon that sweet, frank,

kind Marie by even hinting that her father desired him to marry her?

"I cannot tell you my motive," said Charlie, abruptly, "but I can tell you that I have to choose between this six hundred a year and everything I care for in the world."

"After all," said Glencairn, thoughtfully, "six hundred a year is not the chief good of the world; and yet I wish, for your sake, it were within your reach, Charlie."

At last they arrived at the corner of Oxford Street, and got down from the 'bus. Glencairn held out his hand, and said, with an effort at cheerfulness—

"Now go home, Charlie; and set to work, and win the six hundred a year that is at present denied you."

"I may try to do that," said Charlie,

"but I am not going home just now. You are too weak to go about alone; besides, you are careless in keeping yourself wrapped-up, and so forth. I am not busy; I shall come with you."

"No, no, lad; your time is too precious. Get you home."

"No. Tell me how long you will remain in your place, and I shall walk about and then call for you."

"My business may be over in half an hour, and perhaps not until eight o'clock at night."

"Then I'll call in half an hour, and see."

Charlie walked along Oxford Street during the half-hour, and part of it he spent in front of a picture-dealer's window, which was filled with the ordinary number of tea-tray sunsets and hut interiors. Here was a pinky and delicately-featured young

lady in a russet gown, seated before a tub and pealing potatoes; there a Regent Street girl, with laces and flounces, stuck in the middle of a country lane, and called "Contemplation."

"Is this the next sacrifice you will demand of me, Fanny?" he thought. "Must I take to the manufacture of those sealing-wax skies and polished mountains? Or how do I know that I can even do that? How do I know but that my failure may be caused by my not being able to paint as well as that?"

The last thought stung him very keenly. To doubt the course he was pursuing in art—that difficult course in which so many young men get disheartened—that effort to reach true work by avoiding the meretricious make-shifts which dealers purchase and an ignorant public love—was a horrible suspicion which he chased from

his mind by abruptly breaking away from looking at these theatrical daubs, and by vigorously making his way along the crowded street.

"No!" he said to himself, "they shall take what I consider my best and truest work, or I give up the struggle. Imperfect efforts after excellence are better than the triumphs of mediocrity; and I will either paint well or not at all. They can do no worse than starve me."

But at this particular time, when the public, in art as in some other things, is seized with a passion for clap-trap, and oddity, and melodrama, and artificial sentiment, and what not, was it not too likely that he would starve?

Meanwhile he went on to Mr. Glencairn's place of business, and found the old man contented, if not radiant.

"We have managed to stave off the evil

day," he said, as they made their way home, "but sooner or later it must come."

"But why should your business not be as good now as ever it was?"

"Why should we grow old? Why should change fall upon anything? The business never did more than struggle through, and now I shrink from contemplating how much we are in arrears. It cannot hold together in this way much longer."

"But you must do something to save it," said Charlie, eagerly.

"What? I see nothing that can be done. But do not talk of that now. Come home with me, and have a cup of tea with us. I like to have you at our table more than any one I know."

"Thank you, but indeed I can't," said Charlie, who fancied he had sufficiently intermeddled with family affairs that day.

Having parted with Mr. Glencairn at his door, he hurried home, and began anxiously to turn over his sketches in order to catch up, with his freshened eyes, what novelty of subject was in them. Then he turned to the small landscape he had left finished: the reader may remember that it was one of the four ordered for a lady-purchaser.

As he cast his eye over it, he paused, and a slight tinge of colour came over his forehead. He lifted his palette, took a brush, and carefully painted out certain initials which, with his own, it was his custom cunningly to interweave into every picture he painted. And this picture, he now knew, was going to Marie.

CHAPTER V.

THE CHALLENGE.

FOR a little time after her return, Fanny was very "good." She was very attentive to her father; almost won over her mother; and was particularly kind to Charlie when he came to see them. She began to think the house was as it had been before Helstone came near it.

Then she wrote him a long and tender letter one evening, and nothing could exceed the playful delicacy and charming innocence of her style. And the post-script of the letter was this: "*Work hard, Charlie, for my sake.*"

You may suppose he did work hard; but one may work hard for a long time without altering the public taste or improving the mind of those purveyors who come between the artist and the public.

As for Helstone, no one heard of him for some days. On the afternoon of his arrival in London, he went to Guy's, and did not get much satisfaction from his friend Dr. Blake. He received some practical information on the subject of hallucinations in general, and the manner in which scientific analysis had decided that visions and other supernatural phenomena arise from the stomach. But Helstone was puzzled, and was vexed that he was puzzled. His own mind had naturally much of what is called "scientific method," and nothing delighted him more than to show his sagacity by tracing and pointing out causes which

would have escaped the observation of most people. Knowing little of natural science, he had a quite scientific precision, caution, and accuracy of thinking; and one of his favourite psychological studies was to analyse, and occasionally to trace to a physical cause, the various subtle emotions which thrilled through Fanny's sensitive organization, and which she herself loved to consider and narrate. But in this personal matter he was entirely at fault, and he was annoyed at being so baffled.

He was advised, however, either to give up literary labour altogether for some time, or else to work regularly, and, if possible, in the prosecution of one study.

He chose the latter alternative: he was unwilling to leave London now when London was coming to life again; unwilling, also, to give up entirely his

journalistic work. And if the reader should fancy that a man does not prosecute one study who has to write within the course of a week on Italian finance, on a recusant English statesman, and on a sewage-project for the south of Yorkshire, I must add that the journal to which Mr. Helstone contributed demanded no particular knowledge of anything beyond Joe Miller and Lemprière.

Helstone at first wrote thrice a week, and devoted the intervening evenings to reading, or to social fellowship with one or two companions. He then began to try his nerves by making experiments at midnight, by exercising his eyes with the sudden removal of lights, and so forth, until he arrived at the conclusion that if he were again to be subjected to optical illusions, they would result from some congenital or constitutional weakness which

was beyond relief. He had heard no news of Fanny during this period of probation; he now resolved to do his utmost to renew communication with her. He dared not write to her, but he fancied that a milder domestic government would allow her to take her accustomed forenoon walk, and in that case he knew well when and where to find her.

So one morning he made his way to the south of the river, and, walking out the long, broad thoroughfare which leads from the slums of Lambeth, found himself approaching Clapham Common. Here the air was pure and cold, a pale sunshine fell on the long slopes of furze and grass and on the yellowed poplars and elms that were now letting their shrivelled leaves drop to the ground. There was even blue sky visible, and that imperfectly mirrored in the various ponds which were

ruffled with a brisk breeze from the south-east.

He had with him a handsome retriever, which, immediately on coming within sight of the first pond, made for the water, and having jumped in and swam about in pursuit of nothing in particular (but making pretence all the same to be earnestly looking for something), returned to the margin of the small lake, and with much expressive action demanded to be legitimately sent in again. But the dog's master paid no attention. He seemed to be unaware of the presence of the water, and took no notice of the eager eye and tail of his companion. He walked on, under the tall, half leafless trees; and the retriever, having barked once or twice, having again plunged into the water and paused hesitatingly there, came out and repaid himself for the disappointment by a long, mad scamper over the grass,

finishing with a wild rolling about on his back. Then he got up, shook himself, and trotted sedately on.

While he was yet a considerable way behind his master, however, a low, soft voice cried—

"Tom! Tom! You naughty dog, come here!"

Tom turned, saw a queenly little woman who stood in the nearest path, and with a quiet, peaceable trot he was soon up to her—and would, indeed, have placed his paws affectionately on her dress had he not been frightened back by a little scream and by the outstretching of two tiny, lavender-gloved hands.

"Down, Tom, there—there's a good dog," said the young lady, and the dog looked up gratefully, letting her know that he knew what she said, and that, if he could not reply to her in her own language, it was not his fault.

When Fanny looked up, she found the dog's master before her, a grave smile on his face.

"I saw you pass," she said, with a kindness which had some real solicitude in it, "and I saw you looked pale and sad. Have you been ill?"

"No," he replied. "I have been alone, and when I am alone I harass myself with useless dreaming and thinking. I am glad I have met you. Are you going home?"

"Not yet," she said; then she accepted his arm, and they went on together.

She no longer feared a meeting with Mr. Helstone. Her recent good behaviour, the excellent terms on which she stood with Charlie, and the pious resolutions she had formed, gave her confidence. She considered herself secure, and therefore entitled to accept, without hesitation, the temporary pleasure of Helstone's society.

In fact, she had a notion that her loyalty to Charlie deserved some such little reward.

She thought it her duty, further, to let him know how faithful she intended to be to her old love; but she would do so gently, so as not to wound him.

"I am glad to see," he said, "that you are allowed a little more liberty, and I hope you have no cause to regret that little adventure of ours."

"None at all," she replied, "except the thought of my own imprudence. I cannot imagine how I did such a thing; but I trust there may be no need for me to think of it again."

"Do you regret it, Fanny?" he asked, looking at her.

She hung down her head for a moment.

"You know," she said, in a low voice, "that, situated as I am with regard to Mr. Bennett, it is—it is not——"

"And so that old phantom of duty is still haunting you?" he asked, suddenly. "You have gone back to your home, wishing to make some reparation to your parents, and you can see nothing to do more pleasing to them than to be kind to their friend and yours? And do you mean, Fanny, that you will extend this kindness to marrying him?"

She did not reply.

"It will be no kindness to either of you. It will be the greatest curse that could fall upon his life; you cannot wound a man more deeply than by giving him indifference for love. You fancy you are acting honourably—that your resolve is a good one—that your motive throughout is praiseworthy. Well, your motive is fair enough. I honour you for having the spirit and the constancy to think of the sacrifice; but I tell you your sacrifice will ruin the man whom you wish to

befriend. I am not talking to a boarding-school girl. I am talking to you, Fanny; and you, as a woman, know the truth of what I say, if it were not for that fatal tenderness of heart you have, which plunges you into all manner of inconsistencies."

"I know what you say is true—very sadly and terribly true. That is no fault of yours, or of mine, or of anybody's. But I know that I am doing my best—and—and I may be unhappy through it—and perhaps I may not be doing what is best for him—but I think I am—I try to do it—and—and I don't think it fair you should embarrass me more by talking in that way."

Her under lip quivered as she spoke.

"I have always been honest with you, Fanny. I could not be your friend, otherwise. Perhaps I may have a selfish interest in what I say; and yet your own

common sense tells you that I am right. Indeed, Fanny, you are too rare and fine a woman to be thrown away in the hopeless experiment of making a man happy whom you cannot love. What is it he wants? Your love. He cannot have it. Not all the powers in heaven and earth could give him that. Without that, would you dare to go and offer to become his wife?"

"I do not make any such offer," she said. "It is he who demands it. He ought to know best what will make him happy. Once, when I told him that his love for me was very strong, he said he had enough for two, and that, if I did not love him much then I should afterwards."

"That is the talk of a child, not of a man. It is a hundred times better for a married pair to be mutually indifferent

than for the one to be indifferent and the other in love. Besides, Fanny, why should you always consult his interest? You are a nobler woman than he is a man."

"You do not know him," she said.

"I know," he replied, "that you carry about with you such a fund of good heartedness and all kinds of beautiful idealisms, that the moment an interesting beggar comes and claims a little kindness of you, you clothe him from head to foot with the rarest graces, and swear he had them all from nature. To me, an outsider, a spectator, these graces dignify and beautify the original owner, not the temporary wearer."

She was flattered, and pleased, and silent. Perhaps, too, she partly believed what he said.

"I say you are a nobler woman than he is a man," he continued; "and you

have no right to throw away your life in an experiment to benefit him."

"Why did you speak to me to-day!" she cried, almost piteously. "I was contented and happy, as I have been ever since I saw you last, and now you come to torture me with the old doubts and fears of what is going to occur. What would you have me do?"

"Be true to yourself. Permit him no longer to think of this blasphemous marriage."

"It will kill him if I tell him that."

"No danger. Life is tenacious, and has few absolute necessities. The world could easily get on without salt, though it would make a wry face for a day or two."

"But I *am* fond of him," she said, receding inch by inch, but fighting every step, "I like to see him in the house. I

like to walk with him. I should like him to have everything that is good and worth having in the world, and then, if he was quite happy, I don't say but I should prefer not to be his wife. But now, when he is poor and has so few friends, when he looks at me like a dumb animal wanting to be petted—you do not know how my heart warms towards him. I know we are not much of companions. When I go out with him, I keep thinking and thinking of other things, and hoping that he does not perceive it. I cannot talk intimately with him as I talk with you; I should be afraid he would be shocked, or would misunderstand me, or might laugh at me —but—but——"

And it suddenly flashed across her mind that since she had come out that morning, her union with Charlie had begun to have a singularly unpleasant

aspect. It lay like a vague and undefined dread along the horizon of her thoughts. She turned, with a strange sense of safety, of companionship, and kindness to the pale, silent man beside her, and she would have done much then to please him, for somehow she feared she had made him unhappy.

By this time they had reached that pond at the further end of the common which has in its centre a small natural island overgrown with trees and bushes. Here Tom renewed his manifestations of delight, and Fanny, taking Helstone's stick, threw it as far as she was able into the water.

As she and her companion stood watching the joyous eagerness with which the dog swam out to the stick, a young man came rapidly walking along the road on the other side of the pond. As he came in

sight of the group now standing by the water's-edge, he paused and stood irresolute for a moment. He then walked back a few paces so that the island intervened between him and them.

The young man was Charlie, who, having been told by Mrs. Glencairn that Fanny had gone for her usual forenoon promenade to the common, had followed her with much cheerful anticipation.

This finding her with Helstone startled him; though he could give no reason for the pain and surprise it caused him. He remained for a few moments sheltered by this island; and then, harbouring certain rebellious and prideful notions, he resolved to steal quietly away and go home by himself.

But as he went round the other side of the pond, he found that Helstone and Fanny were some distance in front of him,

also going home. Proud and angry, he was forced to follow them; scorning himself for the position in which he had placed himself.

Meanwhile Helstone was slowly winning over Fanny's heart by his description of the strange, pleasant week they had spent together at Wrexhill—pleasant in spite of the fear of pursuit and discovery which had haunted her. She confessed to herself that she could willingly spend such another week, if it were only to show some sympathy towards this friend of hers, whom she had rather hardly treated.

"If I marry Charlie," she thought, "is not that all *he* wants: why should I therefore not be kind to this patient and dear friend whose society has such a peculiar charm for me?"

"And through the long, dull winter

that is coming on," he asked, "am I to see you only by fits and snatches—in the streets, as if we were outcasts, and shaming society by our wish to be friends?"

"I am afraid it must be so," she replied, sadly. "My mother never forgives any one."

"I have a little project," he said, with a smile, "which might make our meeting a little more practicable, if I were not afraid of shocking your notions of what is proper and decorous. However, we will not speak of that now. What I was going to tell you is that I am on the point of taking a house out here—a very pretty retired little place which I will show you as we pass. I do not think the gloom of the Temple has a good effect on one's spirits. And do you know whom I have engaged to be my housekeeper?"

"Who?"

"Your old nurse Miguel."

Fanny fairly clapped her hands with delight.

"I am fonder of the dear old woman than anybody in the world, and I shall be so glad to see her. But——"

She looked up into his face, timidly, and with the least reflection of a smile upon her lips.

"That was what you meant," she said, "was it not?"

"Well, yes," he answered. "But I carcely dared propose it. However, we shall see about it, Fanny, when everything is arranged, and when the proposal to pay me or her a visit may not look so startling."

"But how did you discover old Mother Miguel? She was buried somewhere in Buckinghamshire when I last heard of her."

"A friend of mine happened to show me, as a curiosity, a letter from her asking for such a situation, and saying she had been with your family for eleven years. So I made some inquiries, and finally engaged her."

"You seem to have a miraculous power of doing appropriate and pleasing things," she said. "You seem to know everything. You never make a mistake about a train; you know cab-fares exactly; you have the neatest of everything; you are always so precise, and——"

"Stop, stop!" he cried. "I shall begin to cultivate rhetoric immediately, in order to become quite the hero of a novel. If I have been able to please you, I do not want any further compliment. And how I should like, Fanny, to consecrate to your service all through life that superhuman accuracy and pre-

vision with which you are pleased to credit me!"

All this while Charlie was following them at a distance, regarding, like not a few others who turned to look at her, the slight figure that walked so regally, and the splendid head of pale curls that was crowned by one of those rough grey Russian hats which young ladies had then begun to affect. It is useless to guess at what must have been his feelings as he saw her walking thus with Helstone; he fancied that there was cruelty to him in every look which these passers-by directed to her while she was in Helstone's company.

In course of time they passed down by the southerly portion of Larkhall Lane; and there, stepping aside from the main-road, Helstone and his companion paused before a quaint, old-fashioned house of

red brick. Why did they regard this out-of-the-way little place with so much interest?

When they had gone, Charlie also stole up to the house. He saw only the grass-plots in front of the windows, with their large cactus and withering geraniums; and he was about to turn away when he perceived, lying in a corner, a board informing the public that the building was to be let. This board had, apparently, been recently removed. What common interest, he asked himself, could Helstone and Fanny have in looking at a house which was, or which had recently been, to be let?

He walked on. He saw them part. Before she had reached her father's house, he could have overtaken her, but somehow he refused to occupy the place that had just been vacated by his rival. He al-

lowed her to reach home, and not until she had been some time there did he follow her. He found her alone, in the parlour, in front of that poor old piano.

"I was told you had gone to Clapham Common," he said; "and I have been there in search for you."

"Indeed," she replied, coldly; "I thought you were too busy to waste a day in that way."

"I have been hard at work," he said, though he was much mortified, "and I thought I would take a holiday this forenoon; and how could I spend a holiday better than by coming to see you?"

"If you had much desire to see me," she said, significantly, "you would continue at your work."

"I understand," he retorted, with a sudden burst of jealous passion. "It is better I should go on working for you,

that you may be allowed to walk out in peace with Mr. Helstone."

"Oh, you saw us, did you?"

"I did."

"I thought so when you came in."

"And yet you talk of my duty in working. Towards what end?"

"Towards whatever end you please," she answered, calmly; and then she continued—

"Certainly I have no wish to hurry on that end if I am to be the victim of such unreason and caprice as you have just exhibited. I walked out to-day with no expectation of meeting either you or Mr. Helstone. I met him first; and I was unaware that my duty towards you demanded that I should not speak to him."

She turned to the piano, and dashed into some flippant music. Charlie, vanquished and chagrined, had not a word to

say. He went to the window, where he sate for some minutes in a savage silence.

"Is your father in?" he asked, at length.

"He is not. Mamma will be here presently, I suppose."

He knew that he had, perhaps irretrievably, damaged his cause, and yet he knew not how to retrieve the false step. Possibly he was too proud to do so. But, at all events, he knew that when her mother came his last hope of making an explanation would be gone, and that he would go home to his lodgings wretched and miserable.

The prospect was too much for him; he had suffered too severely in that way already.

So he rose, and went over to her, and placed his hand on her hand.

She ceased playing, but she drew her hand away.

"Fanny, do not let us quarrel foolishly."

"I do not wish to quarrel. But you and I seem to be compelled to quarrel, always."

"That will be very different," he said, pleadingly, "when all this uncertainty and perplexity is over. I want you only to tell me that you do not forget your promise."

"You take good care not to allow me to forget it," she replied, "and if I must repeat what I said before, *I tell you that when you are ready, I am.*"

She uttered the words in a low, clear voice, and, turning, regarded him calmly with her eyes. He was too much astonished to make answer. Was this the tone of an affianced bride—this unimpassioned, resolute, semi-defiant speech?

It seemed as if she had steeled herself to keep her promise, despite consequences. It seemed as if she had no thought but to redeem her word, at whatever cost, only to prevent his being able to throw blame upon her. She had made this vow; she would keep it—and compel him to be satisfied.

That is not the satisfaction that a lover demands. Love is the truest instinct of illogical human nature, and can never be cajoled into accepting the symbol for the substance. It was her love he wanted; not her presence in church, before a priest, with a book in her hand. I have heard of cases in which highly respectable young persons, having promised to marry, did consider it their duty to keep that old promise given to other young persons whom in the meantime they had quite ceased to care for; and I never had any

great opinion of the honour or fidelity of the transaction.

Charlie seized her hand, with a sort of blind impulse.

"Fanny, you speak as if I were forcing you to keep your promise. Do you not wish to keep it?"

At this moment Mrs. Glencairn came into the room; and the subject suddenly dropped.

"*When I am ready!*" he said to himself, as he went home. "When shall I be ready?"

He was like to "strike his head against the stars"—not with pride. Why had fortune entreated him so hardly? Were not all these houses on either side of the long streets filled by people who were enjoying domestic happiness; and why was he condemned to remain alone? To think that this treasure of treasures was

within his reach—that a few more pounds a year would enable him to lead home, with that dainty and honourable service which befits a strong and true man, this gentle creature—was to regard a possibility at once delirious and terrible. Would it always be so near his grasp? If, when he was ready to seize it, it should slip away from his fingers—but he turned away his eyes from that phantom.

As it happened, these stars against which he was so rebellious, were kinder to him than he expected, as he was to learn that very day.

CHAPTER VI.

DREAMS BECOME POSSIBLE.

MAJOR VON KIRSCHENFELD and his daughter had by this time returned from Wrexhill to Kensington.

They had not heard a word from Charlie since his abrupt departure; and the Major began to mention his name with a growl of contemptuous dissatisfaction whenever they spoke of him. And one evening, Marie said—

"Herr Major, you are not kind to Charlie."

"Kind to him? Does he deserve our kindness?"

"You are unkind to him because he is not willing to marry me. You do wrong to both of us."

"But you, Marie, you are very fond of him, are you not?"

"Yes, Herr Major," said the girl, simply, and looking up to her father with those honest brown eyes of hers.

"And you would like to marry him, would you not?"

"I would be his wife if he wished it," she said, quietly, "but he does not wish it, and why should you be angry because he cannot marry me? You would not have me marry a man who was not fond of me? Papa, you have been cruel to Charlie, and now you have to atone for that."

"How, mein Schätzchen?"

"You told me he wished to marry some one."

"Yes—an actress—a doll—a girl with

big blue eyes and curly hair like an actress, I tell you, with no more heart than a cat, and with no more womanliness neither. Oh, I have seen her—I have seen this——"

"But what does that matter if he loves her?" said Marie.

She was too true a woman to say anything good of her rival by suggesting that the Major might be guilty of injustice in this sweeping condemnation; and, like a woman, she found an excuse for Charlie in that vague sense of an inevitable destiny which all women possess and cultivate and love.

"You cannot force him to love me, Herr Major, and you wrong *me* in trying it. Now you will be a good papa, and make recompense to both of us."

"And that recompense, Marie?"

"Is to give him as much money as

will let him marry the actress-looking person."

I think there was a little touch of scorn in the way she pronounced "person"; but who could have helped it? As for her father, he looked at her in amazement for a second, then burst into a splendid fit of laughter, and finally began pulling and stroking his magnificent white moustache.

"Why," he said, "you are not a soldier's daughter; I say you are fit to be the daughter of an Austrian countess, reared upon French romances, and doing stupid things so you may have the power to please the priests. You give him money to marry her? You go rather and give her a little of poison—that is the way of the romances."

"I would not give him money to marry *her*. But if I were you, Herr Major,

and had so much money, and I had a nephew so much in trouble, so poor, and so miserable because of the want of money, should I not give it to him? I do not mean you to give him a fortune—only so much as will keep him until he makes money in his profession; and I don't suppose this girl will demand that he should have much money when he marries her. Now, papa, let me take him two hundred pounds a year, and offer it to him myself, and——"

"Marie, this is all of these romances. How could I carry two hundred pounds a year in my pocket, as the young ladies do in the novels, and give it away to anybody? I tell you, canary-bird, I have already offered Charlie money—much more money than that——"

Marie sprang to her feet from the low stool on which she had been sitting, and

her cheeks were burning with a hot, indignant blush.

"That money—was it the price of marrying me?" she asked, rapidly.

"No, Marie," said her father, rather uneasily; "it was—it was merely the telling Charlie of how I should provide against his and your wants if——"

"If he married me," she said, in a low voice.

And then she turned away, with a great pang at her heart, which was worse to bear than the shame and mortification on her face. She went to the door, and she had passed into the hall when her father overtook her and drew her quietly back into the light. As he did so, he saw that her beautiful eyes were full of tears; and somehow this unusual occurrence—which reminded him strangely of the only time he had seen her mother in tears, and of the

horrible self-accusations which the sight had caused him—struck him painfully. He would have thrust the two hundred pounds a year, and Charlie, too, into the fire, to have recalled this unlucky disclosure. He had not seen his daughter cry since she was a child.

"Marie, what is the matter?" he said.

"What will he think of me?" she murmured.

"Think of you?" cried Kirschenfeld, with an angry glare; "why, if he thinks lightly of you, and he about to marry this ballet-girl of a woman—— But he cannot do it, Marie. I told him only what were my plans for you if it was that I go to the war, and—and—very well, Canarienvogel; you shall go to-morrow morning, and offer him what money you please, and ask him to marry his painted doll; and then he will see you have a spirit of your own."

Marie had been anxious enough to rescue Charlie from his present position, and had at first began secretly to buy pictures from him, until she saw that she could not fill her father's house with second-rate landscapes. But now, when Charlie—as her feeling about the matter rather illogically prompted—was condemned to poverty *because* he would not marry her, she felt it necessary to her self-respect that she should be disentangled from the affair, and he left the freedom of his own will. She there and then settled with her father that Charlie should have this money until he should be able to support himself and his wife decently, and that she should go next morning to offer it to him.

Next morning, however, the Major seemed scarcely so willing to yield to Marie's wishes. Here was his pet scheme going to be ruined utterly; for if Charlie

married, it would be impossible for him either to be the Major's substitute in the expected war, or to become the protector of Marie while her father left England. He based his hopes chiefly on the possibility of Charlie refusing the offer.

"Take money from one girl in order to marry another!" he thought. "The man who would do such a thing ought to be chained in a kennel!"

It was towards the afternoon that Marie departed on her mission. She was very brave and self-collected when she set out; but she was not so calm when the brougham stopped opposite the house in which Charlie lodged. In fact, she trembled excessively.

When the coachman had knocked at the door of the house, and been answered by the slavey, Marie made the necessary inquiries and in a few moments followed

the girl upstairs. Charlie met her on the landing, and received her with a pleasant, frank welcome, for he doubted not she had come with some message from her father. When she had entered the large, bare, uncarpeted room, however, and met the light which fell from the upper half of the nearest window (the lower half of the shutters being closed), he said, with a little surprise in his voice—

"You look rather pale, Marie. Will you let me send for some wine? You know," he added, with a smile, "I seldom have wine of my own here."

"Thank you," she said, "I had rather not take any wine just now."

Nor did she accept the chair he offered her. She turned with some embarrassment to the picture which stood on his easel, while he passed behind her to shut the door. When he returned she was still

standing there, looking at the landscape before her.

It was a sketch of a bit of coast scenery near Wrexhill, which she recognized at once, although as yet it was in most parts a mere blotch. Together they had frequently sat upon the cliff there, and looked down on the old tarry shed which covered the fishermens' boats, looked out on the grey sea with its phantom ships gliding along the horizon, and looked at the long promontory which ran out into the water as if determined to withstand that cruel, slow, cancerous working around its base.

"Are you going to put any figures in it?" she asked.

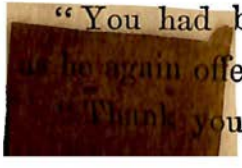
"I may," he said, carelessly; "but do you know, Marie, you are not looking so well as when you were at Wrexhill. Is your father all right?"

"My father is very well," she said.

Twice she tried to turn to him and tell him all she had to say, and each time she felt herself unable to confront him. How would he take the offer, she asked herself; and suggested a dozen different replies he might make, all of which she would rather not hear.

"Have you nothing else to show me?" she asked.

Charlie then concluded that she had come on a mere cousinly visit, or perhaps with a notion of purchasing a picture. So he removed that rough sketch from the easel, and put up successively one or two more finished productions. All the time she stood, and made some slight remark upon each as it was shown to her.



"You had better be seated," he said, as he again offered her a chair.

"Thank you," she said, "but I cannot

wait. The—the brougham is there, and—and I'm afraid I must go. I hope I haven't interrupted your work."

"Not in the least," he said, "but it is so seldom you come here—I think you have only been once before—that you might remain a little, and see all I have been doing during the summer. It is a treat few artists can offer you," he added, with a smile, "because most of them manage to sell *something* in the course of the year."

"Have not you?"

"I don't think I have sold any picture I painted this year; but I have a commission to paint four."

He glanced at her eyes, but they revealed nothing.

"It is a lady, I believe, who has given me the commission; and I should much like to thank her."

"You can thank her by painting the pictures so as to please her."

"Oh," said Charlie, "the pictures won't be worth what she is likely to pay for them, if that rascal of a dealer charges his usual per centage."

"Does he take much more money than he gives to you?"

"I believe he gives us about six pounds for what he sells for twenty guineas, so he is not so exorbitant, after all."

Charlie could see very easily that his visitor did not take the slightest interest in what they were talking about; and he puzzled himself to discover why she was so ill at ease. Had he unintentionally offended her? Then why had she visited him? Or did she come to blow him up, and now lacked the moral courage to

"I must go," she said, at last, holding out her hand. "Good-bye."

He shook hands with her, and was about to open the door, when she paused, looked irresolutely at the floor, and said—

"By the way, Charlie, I wished to say something to you about something else. My father asked you to marry me."

She now raised her eyes, and looked him in the face. Under that clear, straightforward glance, he felt that he dared not tell her a lie, much as he would have desired to do so.

"He spoke to me about it, certainly," said Charlie, "but——"

"It was his kindness to me," she continued, calmly, "that suggested his doing so. But you know that he had neither consulted my wishes nor told me that he proposed doing this."

"Of course I knew that, Marie."

"Very well," she said. "Now I understand from papa that you wish to marry, and that you are in trouble because of your ill-success in your profession."

It was now Charlie's turn to become embarrassed; while Marie, with a calmness which had almost amounted to defiance, but for the mild, truthful eyes, put the matter before him.

"I hope you will not believe, Charlie, that it was only to rescue myself from the awkward position my father's indiscreet goodness had put me in that I have come to you to-day; for indeed I had no idea of my being mixed up in the affair until last evening. However, that does not matter. Now, don't be angry with me, Charlie, for—for I have come with a message from my father that if—if you wanted money particularly just now, he

would be glad if you would accept from him two hundred a year until you had got on a little better in your profession."

Here she laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't misunderstand me, Charlie. It is not because my father talked of your marrying me that he now offers to set you free to marry—to marry that lady—that is to say, if this money will be enough in the meantime. But we were talking of you yesterday, and it seemed so hard, Charlie, that you should be so poorly off, and—and—so you must not be angry with us for thinking of it. You know papa does not know English customs much; and he is rough in his manner; and makes rough proposals; but you know him too well to misunderstand him."

And all this time she had been seeking for some sign of acquiescence in the young

man's face. She read there only the last agony of indecision; while the hot flush on his forehead and cheek showed how he cowered beneath her calm kindness.

For the fact was, his heart had at once leapt towards the acceptation of this money as an immediate means of securing Fanny; while his natural sense of dignity burned at the thought of his being indebted for the winning of her, not to the skill of his own brain or the strength of his own arm, but to the generosity of the girl whom he had "refused." He knew that all this was her doing; and he knew not what to think or say.

"Come," she said, with a frank smile; "there should be no concealment of thoughts between two such old friends as we are, Charlie. And I fancy you have considered that you have wounded my self-respect in that matter between my father

and you. Let that pass. You have not. I was very angry when I heard of it; but now it is not very courteous of you to put me in the position of an injured person. My father fancies that our feelings should be under our command in the same way that a line of soldiers would be under his; and that when we say, 'right about face!' we ought to have our affections fly round at once. Now don't keep me talking, Charlie, there's a good boy; but tell me you will be reasonable, and take this little temporary assistance, and remove all that trouble from your mind."

"It is you have done this, Marie," he cried. "I say you are an angel."

"I am not," she said; "but I am your friend."

"Well," he said; and there he stopped with a singular expression on his face. He had been on the point of saying "Yo-

I accept." A perfect dream was before his eyes—a dream of all that was possible to him of loveliness and love in the earth, and for the moment he was struck dumb by the vision. He forgot the placid eyes that were regarding him. He saw only the quick, joyous flight across the river, the rapid announcement of the happy tidings to Fanny—he saw a bright flash of gladness pass over her face, and then all was lost in that thin rosy haze—or perhaps theatrical gauze—which so fortunately hides the future from eager twenty-five.

And just as he was about to say "Yes" he met Marie's eyes, and he felt that she had been a spectator of the panorama which had been so swiftly unrolled within his brain. The consciousness somehow [illegible] these too-glowing anticipa-

"I know it is all your kindness, Marie," he said; "I know that perfectly. And I am sure you do not believe that I would accept the money only to supply my own necessities. But there are—circumstances which I cannot explain—which——. Well, leave me until to-morrow, and I will decide. Do you think me ungrateful? How could I receive this kindness from you unless I was moved by some powerful motive—something more powerful than the mere wish to get on in the world, and—— Marie, somehow I am ashamed to tell you; but you know what I mean."

"Why should you be ashamed to tell me?" she replied, simply. "You mean that you would only use this offer in order to marry the—the lady of whom my father spoke. But I knew that, Charlie, when I came here."

"I know you knew that," he burst out,

in his blundering way, "and I say you are an angel."

She reddened slightly, but there was a smile on her lips.

"Why an angel, Charlie," she asked, "because I wish to put it in your power to marry this lady? You are not very civil this morning, or else my father has misled you——"

"I did not mean that at all!" said Charlie, eagerly; and his very eagerness was suspicious. "I meant that so few women in your place would take the trouble to be so considerate, and kind, and all that. That was what I meant. So I don't want to accept your kindness lightly; and if you will give me until to-morrow—no, until this day next week—I will give you an answer."

"Very well," she said. "And in the meantime you will not be so worried when

you know that at any moment you can make use of this help. And don't be too proud after I go away, Charlie, and think you ought not to accept this—for that would not be friendly and just to either my father or myself. Good-bye."

"Good-bye, Marie," said the young man, pressing her hand. "You are the best friend I have in the world, and you have always been that."

When she had gone he turned to the contemplation of her offer with a sore sense of dissatisfaction. He knew that he had not met her frankly; he would fain have had her back again, that he might tell her all the admiration, and love, and kindness he felt for her; and he was afraid she had gone away with much reason to complain of him.

"She is the only friend I have," he thought, "in whose estimation I care to

stand well; and I *hope* she does not think me ungrateful, or vacillating, or——"

Here he turned to the picture which he had replaced on the easel.

"I do not like to take this money," he thought. "How much rather would I toil away with these colours—if it were not for *her!* But if she were with me, should I not be able to paint better, with my mind free from all this doubt and harassing thought?"

So he fell to dreaming there, and the twilight came down, and he sat in the darkness without knowing it, for the picture that now lay before him needed no lamp to illumine it. It was a picture more beautiful than these dull landscapes of his—the vision of a small house, white-gabled, with honeysuckle round the porch, and white roses round the window, with a garden looking down to the sea on the

south, with a large room on the northern side, receiving the full clear light without a tinge of sunshine, and letting it fall on many a gorgeously-covered canvas; and this vision changed and again changed, for the next moment he was out in the garden, in the yellow light, among the warm perfumes of the flowers, and Fanny was stooping over a tall rose-bush and snipping off withered leaves; and then he was in the comfortable parlour, lying on a sofa, and the rich glow of the lamp fell upon Fanny's head and shoulders as she sat at the piano and played the old, sad, Irish melodies which he loved—"Savourneen Deelish," and "The Green Bushes," and "Shule Aroon."

And all that was within his reach, look you. He had but to stretch forth his hand, and pluck the rich, ripe grapes. He could not remain in that pent-up room,

with this luxurious thought stirring him like wine. He put on his cap, and wandered out into Hampstead Road; and he pitied the pretty chaffering of these poor women who hung around the butcher's shops. He pitied the wretched faces that passed him; and wondered whether these unhappy creatures had ever even dreamed such a dream as now filled his brain. He saw the haggard cheekbones, the sad eyes, the slouching, hopeless gait of the people, and asked himself if they were pleased to live, if they considered the gift of life to be a good to them. And then he thought of all his friends; and this one had a bed-ridden wife, and that one had a failing business, and the other was cursed with a decayed lung. Every one seemed to have something which dimmed his life; except himself—and it was not in his imagina-

tion to produce a lovelier future than that which now awaited him. For by this time he had resolved to accept the money which Marie had offered, provided that Fanny saw there was immediate cause to do so.

Through the mere wilfulness of happiness, he did not go over to tell her for several days. He kept pondering over it in his mind, and regarding it, and feasting his imagination upon it, even as a schoolboy deals with a tart before he finally gulps it. He was safe, you understand, to win; and he took a pleasure in holding up his cards to the last moment in order to be able to throw down all his trumps at once, with a proud and magnificent air.

Had she not said "*when you are ready, I am?*"

CHAPTER VII.

ANOTHER OFFER.

MEANWHILE Helstone had entered his new house, and Mother Miguel had come from Buckinghamshire to take charge of it. It was not a large house, but it was capable of being turned into a very comfortable house; and Mr. Helstone, with the consent of the landlord, did his utmost with it.

He put up a thin iron verandah, with ornate work and slender pillars, painted grey, before the dining-room windows, fronting the long garden behind the dwelling. He removed the partition be-

tween two of the apartments up-stairs, and made a drawing-room there, and he paid sixty guineas for a piano—which he would not have done had he only expected to play on it himself. These alterations were made rapidly; and when they were complete—why Fanny happened to be passing, and whom should she see but old Mother Miguel?

Could there be any mistake? There were the thin, grey, twisted face, the shallow grey eyes, the tiny grey curls, and the extraordinary cap, and collar, and black dress. In a moment the door was opened, the precise little woman had run down to catch Fanny's hand in both of hers, to drag her within the green railings, and pour forth a number of delighted enquiries in a great, deep voice that startled one as it came from the thin, automatic old body.

Mrs. Miguel had married a mysterious Spanish captain, whom none of her friends in Buckinghamshire had ever seen. The only proof of the marriage was a daughter, and the singular character Mrs. Miguel bore for unexampled probity, and honesty, and accuracy. It was not possible for her to have "made a slip"; for long before committing herself she would have calculated minutely the consequences, and put them down on paper with those hieroglyphics which only her daughter could translate into modern speech. Further, she had the highest reverence for her husband, who was supposed to be dead; and the greatest love for everything Spanish. She aspired to dress herself in the costume of a Spanish woman; and had some vague theory that whatever was *outré* and unwearable in England must be of foreign manufacture, and was probably therefore

Spanish. If, consequently, she saw in her wanderings a large pair of white glass ear-rings which not even an English mill-girl would dare to wear, she was sure to purchase them. In process of time she naturally became, from top to toe, a museum of oddities in ornament and dress; and she maintained the character by gravely affecting to sneer at English costume, and manners, and decorations. She never saw a Spanish woman; but she was sure she was one. She would have pointed to her head-dress, her ruffled collar, her ear-rings, her gown, her shoes and rings, and asked you if she *could* be an ordinary English woman.

The interest she showed in Fanny and her family was real and unaffected. Nature had done Mother Miguel a cruel injustice. She looked a concrete mass of suspicion, cunning, and duplicity—what with her

watchful grey eyes, her thin twisted face, and her prim mouth—while she was one of the few women who retain in their old age the loyalty and fidelity, if not entirely the simplicity, of their youth. She knew that gratitude has not much market-value, and yet she would have sacrificed a great deal to her gratitude. She saw that disinterestedness was a rare thing—a thing that scarcely anybody expected of anybody else, unless it was prescribed to them as a duty—and yet she would have done a disinterested action without the ghost of an after-thought.

"So you have come to live in London, Mrs. Miguel?"

"Yes, Miss Fanny," said the small woman, with that preternaturally bass voice, "but will you not come in? My new master says as he knows your family

Fanny, with a little bashfulness, followed her up the steps.

"What a fine lady you've grown, Miss Fanny; and didn't it come true, as I said? But who'd ha' thought you'd ha' been so straight and 'andsome, and where did you get the curls, Miss Fanny? for missis—as I still call her—never 'ad 'em, as you know. Law, you mustn't mind my sayin' of it, but I don't believe as there's such a straight-down natural beauty as you are in all the city o' London. And you've still your sweet voice yet, as used to coax the bits o' sugar out o' me, and the jam—I do declare it gladdens my 'art to see you this day, and you so grown, and lady-like, and 'andsome."

"A pretty string of compliments," said a voice in front of her, and the next moment she stood opposite to Mr. Helstone, who threw open the dining-room door and

allowed her to pass in. Mother Miguel paused irresolutely at the threshold, as if awaiting her master's orders.

"Take some wine up to the drawing-room," he said to her, and then turned to Fanny.

There was a sort of comic embarrassment on her face, and a partial smile on her lips.

"What would mamma say?" she asked.

"I have just discovered a reason why no one with Scotch blood in his or her veins can have any respect whatever for parental authority."

"Then pray don't tell it me," she said, "for your reasons always suggest terrible things."

"This does not," he continued. "I merely ask how it is possible for Scotch children to honour their father and mother, when the only inducement is that their

days may be long in such a land as Scotland?"

"I knew it," she said; "you are always saying something like that."

"I wish I could," said he. "It is precisely the sort of thing that dinner-giving people like. Will you go into the garden?"

He opened the folding glass doors, she passed out into the little verandah, and then descended, he following.

It was not a spacious garden, but his predecessor had made the most of it. Its chief advantage was its seclusion, which was complete. Only at the further end could it be overlooked; and as this end joined a good stretch of meadow the strollers in Helstone's garden were only subjected to the supervision of a venerable cow, which was now rubbing itself against some pailings at the extremity of the field.

The garden had been very tastefully laid out, though now the falling of October leaves and the drooping of dried stalks somewhat interfered with its beauty. October, however, had made a splendid recompense in changing to a glowing crimson a Virginia creeper that trailed its magnificent masses of leaves over a summer-house at the end of the small enclosure. The rusty autumn sunlight that fell upon these pulpy waves of colour only deepened their intensity, while it softened the coldness of the green shades into which the half-withered leaves faded. No sooner was Fanny come to this summer-house, than she entered and examined it all round with a childish delight. It was composed entirely of oak, and had a massive block of the same wood in the centre for a table. The small windows on each side were of stained glass; and over the door was a

motto in some ceramic material, with white letters ón a blue ground.

"AMBULANTES IN HORTO AUDIEBANT VOCEM DEI."

"What is that?" she asked, looking at the inscription.

"It means that the breath of flowers is the life of Pantheism."

"The explanation might have been in Latin too," she replied, with a smile.

"I once thought," he said, scarcely heeding her, "of becoming your father's pupil. I should like to have gone into special microscopic inquiry with a man like him."

"You cannot do that now," she replied. "Papa is trying hard to give up his studies, and does not like to acknowledge to any one that he secretly steals half-an-hour now and again. And you went and

quarrelled with mamma, also; as if there wasn't enough of vexation in the world. But I think that can be got over."

"How?"

"You know, papa, being a Scotchman, does not keep Christmas; and therefore mamma is very particular about keeping it. She will forgive anybody who comes to her on that day, because she thinks it her duty."

"But what am I to ask her to forgive me?" inquired Helstone.

"The quarrel."

"Which was of her seeking, not mine."

"That does not matter. There is only the one way of being reconciled to her."

Fanny spoke with an easy decision, which showed she had studied the subject.

"And until then I am condemned to see you furtively, as if merely to speak to

you, Fanny, were a crime which we must conceal from everybody."

"Well, you brought it upon yourself by your own imprudence; and now you must do penance, and be very humble, and perhaps she will pardon you, and then you may come to the house as you used to do."

He turned to her with a sudden earnestness.

"Why should you and I be subjected to these restraints? We are old enough to have seen something of the world; we are old enough to know that we are suited to each other, and that we ought not to live apart—why should we live apart? Why not continue existence as it is now with us—at this moment? But no! The society in which you live demands that I should undergo a degrading ordeal, and that you should be flattered with a hypocritical homage; and at the end of it all,

we are united by a bond forged by the fear and intolerance of man, and hateful in the sight of God."

"What do you mean?" she asked, looking at him with a vague terror.

"Come in-doors," he said; "I cannot tell you here."

He led her into the house, and up to the large drawing-room. She opened the piano, and sat down to it; and while she lightly touched a few notes with her right hand, she listened to what he had to say.

And that speech of his was about marriage—a speech I do not mean to reproduce here. Many of my readers may not have undergone the preliminary education which it was Fanny's privilege to have received from her instructor; and it is only too probable that his opinions on this, as on many other matters, would

only needlessly shock them. For he had his subject carefully prepared. He disabused her mind of the notion that our existing laws of marriage had the authority of the Bible; and then, transferring the question to the region of theoretical ethics, he very soon brought a host of witnesses to prove that marriage, as at present constituted, was a profound mistake.

What could a young girl reply to this mass of evidence? His speculations did not even strike her with surprise—so artistically subdued were they. Indeed she had been taught to anticipate them for the most part; and she was not unwilling to agree with him that ecclesiastical interference with a civil contract was an unbearable piece of social tyranny.

"And now, Fanny," said he, as he took her hand, and spoke in a low, persuasive

voice, as if he were speaking very intimately to an intimate friend, "why should we not be married here, at this moment, even as the old Jews married, by giving our full consent and taking each other for man and wife?"

Well, the mind—especially the mind of a girl of nineteen—is very facile, and can be led on by imperceptible degrees to accept almost anything. But when it offers to its possessor the result of this mental tuition in a definite form, he is sometimes terribly startled. A man may go on admitting the successive stages of an argument; and yet leap away from the inevitable climax of it as if it were an erect boa-constrictor. Fanny had borne her logical training equably and peaceably; but this sudden deduction from it somehow choked the blood about her heart and paled her cheek.

What was she to say?

"Would that be a true marriage?" she asked, in a low voice.

"As true a marriage as it is possible to solemnize upon earth. Have I not shown it to you?" he said earnestly.

"Yes—yes—but—" and here she was aware that her fingers were trembling.

She looked into his face—a little wistfully, as if she were trying to read something there, or as if she were trying to connect the affectionate language of his eyes with this strange future which he had so suddenly proposed. She had learned to turn to him, in all matters, for instruction; should she shrink back now? At this supreme moment—the greatest crisis of her life—should she boldly throw herself upon his guidance, and reply to this apparently honest offer by a tender abandonment? Was it not

his future, also, that he pledged?—the future of one who was so greatly her intellectual superior. And yet—and yet—there was a vague dread about the idea, which paralysed her action for the moment.

All at once she rose, with passion in her face, and with the fate of her whole life on her lips—and at that moment some one knocked at the door.

It was Mrs. Miguel, who, entering, handed a letter to her master.

Fanny, to cover her agitation, endeavoured to play a lively waltz; but her fingers blundered dreadfully. Mother Miguel, however, as she well knew, was ignorant of the horror of false chords, so she played on. The piano was a good one—somewhat metallic in tone as yet—and there was plenty of noise to drown occasional slips. There being no

music in sight, she was forced to play from memory; and she continued this wild, incoherent, stumbling effort until the housekeeper had left. Even then she continued to make a pretence of playing, with the one hand.

When Mrs. Miguel had gone downstairs, Helstone again drew near to Fanny, and, sitting by her side, began to talk to her in a low, pleading, persuasive voice. She turned over the leaves of a book which lay on her knee; but her eyes saw nothing, and she breathed heavily.

Half an hour thereafter she left Helstone's house, alone. She seemed to see no one as she passed down the road; and she was pale.

During that afternoon her mother noticed, with some surprise, that Fanny was particularly affectionate and desirous of pleasing. She performed her little house-

hold duties with a care and attention which were obviously intended to win for her her mother's approbation. At the same time she was unusually silent and thoughtful; and sometimes started slightly when she was spoken to.

CHAPTER VIII.

COLD WATER.

ON the same evening Charlie went over to Clapham, and walked up to Mr. Glencairn's house. He was now going to secure for himself the realization of all his dreams; and in his generosity and magnificence he was already nursing projects for the amelioration of the whole family.

The sum of two hundred a year was going to work wonders. Fanny had been brought up economically. She knew what it was to make the most of a small income. Besides, would not Charlie's personal

winnings certainly increase, until he was in a position to extend his hand quite royally to the needy and oppressed?

He never thought for a moment of saving a farthing, even when he was most despondent about his own success. No. Mr. and Mrs. Glencairn had laboured long for Fanny's sake; it was but right they should now share her good fortune; that peace and good-will and happiness should preside over the entire household.

Charlie was not quite sure about inviting the old people to stay with him. He had heard so much of mothers-in-law that he had a traditional fear of them; but he knew that no annoyance could exist in the sunshine of Fanny's presence, and to her decision he accordingly left the matter.

When he entered the parlour, Mr. Glencairn was poring over some business books which he had brought home with him;

Mrs. Glencairn was sewing at some flimsy little ornament in pink silk; Fanny was pretending to read a book, and, though she had stared hard at the page before her for about an hour, she had not turned over the leaf.

Mr. Glencairn received Charlie very kindly. Had he not said to him there was no face he so much liked to see at their tea-table as his?

"Fanny, my dear," he said, gently, "you may surely put down your book when Charlie comes to see us."

She was very pale as she rose to shake hands with him; and she turned away her eyes from the warm, glad glance with which he looked at her.

"What a fool am I," he thought, "to expect she should know our good fortune merely by my manner."

This he said to himself; but the next

moment he could not forbear noticing her singular agitation. Why had his appearance so disturbed her? She was not accustomed to exhibit these emotional phases. When she was teased, or angered, or frightened, she showed it at once, and in a few moments had recovered her usual easy tranquillity; but now, from no cause which he could divine, she was markedly discomposed, and apparently anxious to escape observation.

She took up her book again, and kept some distance back from the table, seeing that Charlie had entered into conversation with her father.

How glad the old man was to throw aside these books, over which he had been puzzling himself! He drew in his chair to the fire, allowed a big, sleepy, black tom-cat to jump on his knee and lie there, purring and winking at the flames, while

he began to talk to Charlie of the country, of the late harvest, and the coming winter. And then he drew the young man into describing Wrexhill as it now appeared; and they compared this Wrexhill with the Wrexhill which Mr. Glencairn remembered; and they talked of the beach, and of the sea, until you could have fancied that both of them sniffed the strong saline breeze and listened to the roar and plunge of the water on the shingle. With what a pure, childish gladness the old man talked! And then he must needs repeat his botanizing adventures; and to illustrate them he lit a candle and went into his study, and brought back a pile of sheets from his herbarium, and soon Mrs. Glencairn's table was covered with those blue breadths of paper which had spectral plants stretched over them.

"Take care, my dear," he said, as Mrs.

Glencairn inadvertently pushed one of them over the edge of the table.

"Do not fear," she said; "I shall not injure them. I know how expensive they have been to us; and we *ought* to value them."

She turned to Fanny, and said, sharply,

"Fanny, I wish you would lay down that book, and go and get me some braid. I do not know where you learnt the habit of becoming a mummy the moment you take a book in your hand. I am sure it was not from me."

Fanny was evidently very unwilling to go; and not the less so that Charlie had at once offered to accompany her. She suggested to her mamma that the maid might go.

"Go yourself, my dear," said her mamma, coldly. "It is better you should learn to do things for yourself. You do

not know how soon you may be compelled to earn your own living."

Charlie pretended not to hear this bitter speech, and volunteered to go himself for the braid, if Mrs. Glencairn could make him understand what she wanted.

Fanny, therefore, was obliged to accept the mission; and Charlie, of course, went with her.

She was silent, and evidently disinclined to speak. Almost in spite of her, he drew her hand within his arm as they passed into the dark streets.

"I do not wonder, Fanny, you should have learned to feel hopeless when you see me. You have come so to connect me with poverty, and self-sacrifice, and a dreary future, that the very sight of me must depress you."

This he said—the cunning fellow!—to heighten the contrast with the splendid

intelligence he was soon to let down, like a ray of sunlight, upon her.

"Oh, no, no!" she said, earnestly, and yet with a strange coldness in her tone, "I hope you do not believe that. I may have said so in fun; but you know how all of us like to see you."

"That is good enough in its way," he said, persisting in his artistic deception, "as a mark of friendship; but yourself, Fanny—have you not sometimes wished you had not promised yourself to a poverty-stricken fellow, with such a prospect of struggling, and enduring, and waiting?"

"A promise," she said, timidly, "could never become a means of compulsion between two people who like each other."

This little remark frightened Charlie. He had not calculated upon leading her

to such dangerous ground; and he very rapidly drew back.

"But there's no need of talking any more about that, Fanny," he said, joyously. "No, that is all past and gone."

"Why?" she said, not without an inward tremor of anticipation.

"Because, my pet, I have the offer of as much money as will at least secure us a comfortable home and something to live on; and, if you like, we can be married to-morrow morning."

Was it intentionally or instinctively that she withdrew her hand from his arm? They were not far from the draper's shop, and Charlie, as he followed her into the place, fancied she had postponed her expressions of satisfaction until her purchases were over.

There was a pale youth, with a large shirt-front, and a winning smile, who came forward to "attend" to Fanny. What was there in the young man's position, or his manner, or his dress, that made him an object of such intense scorn to a poor devil of an artist, who sometimes could not make a pound a week, whose own costume was not of the best fit, whose manners were those of a rough bachelorhood as yet untamed by the gentle tuition of drawing-rooms? This pale youth had perhaps thirty shillings a week, had probably quite a respectable debt at his tailor's, was much freer and franker with women than Charlie could hope to be, and found apparently higher delights in the Alhambra than ever Charlie did in the gloomy rooms of the National Gallery.

Nevertheless, Charlie regarded him with a splendid contempt, was almost angry

when he smiled to Fanny, and would not accept the chair which the youth's companion—a short, stout man, with a red face, bushy black whiskers, and in-knees —offered. As he was standing in this way, looking at the bonnets and ribbons which hung behind the window, he saw the face of a woman who, from the outside, was evidently regarding Fanny with much attention.

She was a tall woman, somewhat sallow-featured, dressed in mourning. There was nothing particular in her face except a certain intensity — an expression of will and passion which was more visible in the eyes than in the soft and well-formed mouth.

He had frequently seen people look at Fanny in passing, struck by her fine eyes or bright hair; but he was certainly astonished by the persistent and half-medita-

tive gaze which this woman directed towards the young girl, causing her face to assume an almost ghastly look as it glimmered in from the darkness without.

He went forward and touched Fanny upon the shoulder. At the same moment the woman outside darted a quick look towards him—a look which he just caught with his eye as she disappeared.

"Well?" said Fanny.

"I was going to tell you to look at a woman outside who was staring at you in a singular way; but she is gone—that is all."

Fanny's business being done, she rose and left the shop; and somehow she managed to avoid taking Charlie's arm. She was once more silent; and she seemed to hurry on with an anxiety to get home at once.

Charlie was disappointed — almost offended.

"You don't say anything, Fanny, about what I told you."

Nor did she say anything now.

"Are you not glad that the old obstacle has been removed—that we have no longer to fear for the future?"

Her further silence slightly alarmed him; and he began to lay aside his complaining tone for one of entreaty.

"Well, perhaps I should not expect you to say anything just now—for the news must have startled you. But I know all you think even when you are most silent—do you remember that evening, my darling, down near Tunbridge? But now—surely you did not understand what I said——"

"Yes, I did," she stammered.

"And what do you say, dear?"

He laid hold of her hand, and prevented her going so fast.

"Why should you be in such a hurry, Fanny?" he said.

"Mamma may be waiting for these things—and—and she knows we are out together——"

"Why should we not be out together? There is no harm in that, surely. Now tell me, Fanny, before we arrive at the house, what you—what you think, what you propose to do."

"Oh, I cannot say anything now," she said, almost wildly.

He was thunderstruck by the despair which rang in this exclamation; and he looked at her pale face with a dull sense of terror and pain.

"You cannot say anything!"

"No—I did not expect it—I was not

prepared for what you tell me—and now —oh, why did you not come sooner ?"

The last few words she uttered in a perfect agony of bitterness—which seemed all the more sad and terrible that they were wrung from the lips of such a delicate, pretty, gentle-looking thing. She shuddered as she spoke—or Charlie fancied she did; and he was struck with an inexplicable dread.

"Am I too late, then ?" he said, in a voice which startled her by its calmness.

She appeared to recollect herself. She walked less rapidly—less as if she was flying from some pursuer—and she compressed her lips slightly. Charlie had now to fight with her brain;—how could he miss being fooled, baffled, blinded ?

"Too late ? There is no such thing as being too late, is there ? When people are free to do as they choose, they need not

be so frightened. No, Charlie—I—I was surprised by what you told me—of course; and almost half afraid, because it was so sudden. But now I should like to hear of this good fortune that has come to you."

So he told her, briefly, the story of Marie's visit. They were almost home by this time; and so she permitted him to lead her onwards for some little distance, in order that they might have their talk out. But presently they found themselves fronting Larkhall Lane.

"Not there," she said, drawing back, "anywhere but there."

"Why should you have formed such a dislike to this old place, where we have so often been?"

They turned back, however, and he continued to point out the admirable ease with which their marriage could be arranged, the temporary and future pro-

vision he meant to make for her father and mother, so soon as this money afforded him leisure for attempting some ambitious work which was, naturally, to make his fortune.

"I only saw your uncle once, you remember?" she said.

"Yes."

"I did not like him. He was too imperious, too blunt—he seemed to despise me because I wasn't a big soldier like himself."

"But, then, his goodness—his——"

"If I were a man," she said, with a charming simplicity, "I should not like to be beholden for my wife to another man's goodness."

"It is a loan," said Charlie, anxiously. "Of course I will pay back the money."

"And as little should I like to take a wife on the security of a loan. Perhaps

men may think differently; but that is my feeling. A woman ought to know that her husband has worked in order to win her, as Jacob did for Rachel; I'm sure Rachel would not have been pleased if Jacob had got the money from his father to pay for her."

"She would not," said Charlie, "for they had no aristocratic habits in those days. But in our times, you know, the custom is different."

"Perhaps so," she replied; "but to tell you the truth, Charlie, I would rather wait any length of time than ask you to undergo the degradation of taking the money. I know you would never have thought of such a thing but for my sake; and I am sure I would rather not compel you to what must be a sacrifice of your own self-respect."

This she said in a low and quiet voice,

never looking him in the face. She was now apparently quite composed: what was the meaning, he afterwards asked himself, of the wild, passionate outburst which had preceded this conversation?

In the meantime he had nothing to say against her decision. It grieved him; but her argument was unanswerable. He saw himself relegated to that dreary task of hoping against hope, with the prospect of his marriage, which had suddenly been placed so near him, become as distant as ever.

"It seems hard, Fanny," he said, sadly, "to throw away this chance. And yet I suppose you are right."

"Trust in yourself, Charlie," she replied to him—and how could he refuse the advice of so gentle a monitor?—"and in the end you will be as proud of yourself as I shall be of you. Circumstances

may be against you; but you will have done your best."

So long as he was with her, the decision to which she had come did not seem so painful; but when he returned to his cold lodgings, it was with a bitter regret he could not conceal that he sat down in the midst of the blankness and isolation to think of the future that now lay before him.

CHAPTER IX.

IN KENT.

FOR some little time nothing particular happened in the relations between the various personages of this drama. There was an uneasy calm, a distrustful silence hanging over them. They subsided into the mere dull, uninteresting people whom one is accustomed to pass without notice in the street. They were as commonplace as the poor figures who haunt a stage-door about twelve o'clock in the forenoon—those shabby, muffled-up men and women who lounge about the wings with dirty biscuits in their hands, or pause in

groups on the dull, grey stage, and look into the great, empty pit before them, while they make feeble personal jokes. But the prompter's clock, with the finger of Destiny for its hour-hand, is going steadily on; and soon these ordinary-looking figures are to be glared upon by a tragic limelight of incident which shall call them out of obscurity into a sharp and painful relief, throwing ominous shadows around them.

The first shaft of this fatal splendour fell upon Mr. Glencairn. A crisis had been long imminent in his affairs; and discovered only too late to avert it. For a time he had managed to postpone the evil day, with that vague hope of some unexpected relief which seldom deserts men in any circumstances. And in this temporary calm it happened that one morning he rose to find the weather sin-

gularly altered. For a fortnight back there had hung over the city a cold, dry, grey mist. On the night preceding this morning there had been a severe storm of wind and rain; and now, as he went to the window, a bright, dazzling blue sky smote his eyeballs with a confused light; there was a strange freshness in the air; the pavements were white; and the half-bare trees stretched their slender black arms into the warm sunlight as if to ask why they had no leaves to shake in that joyous temperature.

He took his breakfast quickly. He was anxious to get into the open air.

When he went out, Mrs. Glencairn understood that he was going to the city, and such doubtless was his own intention. But when he opened the door, and felt the mild breath of the air on his cheek, when he saw the bright light and the intense

sky, he turned his head for a moment southward.

It was a moment of indecision. And what was he thinking?

"*God will not grudge me one day in the country—one last glimpse before we fall into the sleep of winter.*"

There was important business to be done that day in town—he knew that, but somehow the thought had the remoteness which we give to the thought of death. Would not Mr. Morrison, who knew his affairs as well as himself, be able to remove this immediate necessity?

The next moment the tall figure, somewhat emaciated, but almost straight under the influence of this new inspiration, was walking up towards Clapham Common station. But first he stopped at a grocer's —being too old a campaigner to go into an unknown country without provisions—and

purchased a few biscuits and a piece of cheese, which, wrapped up in a stout piece of paper, were transferred to the pocket of that old grey coat which had accompanied him on many a similar journey. He paid for his third-class ticket, took his seat in the close, bare carriage, and was speedily moving away from London.

His companions were an old woman and a little girl, and he seemed quite unconscious of their presence, as he sat well up in the corner and gazed out of the window, with the air rushing in and over his face. If one of them had spoken to him, he would have started as from a dream. As it was, the woman regarded with some curiosity this tall, frail man, whose eyes seemed fixed upon the horizon, and who appeared to relish the rushing of the breeze that came full upon his bare throat. Then she saw him smile—a sad

smile, rather; and she wondered if he was thinking of some old adventure of his youth.

They wanted to get out at an intermediate station, and the little girl had to touch his knee before she made him aware of her wish.

"I beg your pardon, my darling," he said, as he opened the door and prepared to lift her out. "But you must wait till the train has quite stopped. And you live in the country always, do you? Goodbye, my dear; God bless you."

The little girl took her mother's hand, and looked back at the old man with the kindly smile and the sad voice; and then he saw them quit the station, as the train passed on.

He stopped at Farningham; and he was the only passenger who got out. He loitered down into the road, and paused

for a moment to look at the long valley with its patches of green and brown, its lines of trees, its clusters of houses, and little church-spires peeping over the tops of the tall, half-leaved elms. And if the air was clear and sweet in Clapham, what was it here?

"Lord, I am grateful to you for this day," he thought, as he passed down into the valley by the nearest road, walking slowly, with his eye wandering in a vague gladness over the rusted woods and hedges and cottages. He sat down on a stile which led to a footpath crossing a low-lying meadow, and took out his pocket-glass to examine the seed-vessel of some plant which he had picked up. Then he went on again, across the fields, apparently with no fixed purpose in his wanderings, until he came to the river which winds down the valley, and to a clump of alders

which stretches along its banks. A great trout, black as night, lay in the nearest pool, and, as soon as he approached, away down the stream it went, leaving a wave in the water above its course.

"Why should you fly from me?" he said, absently. "Or you either?" he added, as a hare darted past him and scuttled away through the bushes.

On he went, trespassing in the most unconcerned manner, through the wilderness of bramble and willow and alder that lay by the river, sometimes finding himself by the water-side, sometimes in the deep, moist recesses of the narrow copse. Now a pair of wood-pigeons would rustle out from a tall tree, or a jay would flash through the branches with a harsh scream, or a moorhen would rise with a prodigious flutter and fly up the river, leaving a long line of light on its surface. One, indeed,

he came upon so suddenly that she had only time to sink in the water, under the opposite bank, where she remained with her scarlet and golden beak almost touching the stream, with her frightened eyes regarding him. He stopped to watch a tiny woodpecker go over every inch of a withered branch, rapping laboriously and carefully round and round. He saved the life of a rabbit by frightening off a weasel which had just attacked it; and he took up the exhausted, trembling creature, and smoothed down her fur, and then let her go again to have many another race for life. A water-rat splashed into the stream beside him; a dabchick ducked down and was out of sight in a moment; a blackbird flew screaming away through the alders.

All these sights and sounds filled him with pleasure. He lost himself in a sort

of friendly intercourse with these creatures around him. He was no longer the harassed ironmonger of Oxford Street; he was no longer even the patient man of science, groping his way into nature's mysteries. He was an animal among animals, and God, the Father of all, was overhead, in the genial light, in the deep-hued sky, and in the warm rushing of the wind.

What a welcome wind that was, fresh and sweet as it came down the pleasant valley, and caught in its course the faint odours of the woods and fields. Was it the sunlight, or was it the wind, that brought a touch of red to his sallow cheek, and brightened the depths of his mild eyes? He sniffed that keen air through his nostrils; he let it play round his throat and blow about his soft grey hair; he listened to its joyous rustling through the trees; he fancied the very

cattle in the meadow over there turned their dull broad foreheads to it with a secret pleasure. Then it brought the distant rumble of a cart; and he turned to look at the far-off village, with its quiet little church, its groups of cottages, its atmosphere of pale blue smoke; and all this life seemed hushed, and sweet, and beautiful. It seemed to him more natural for a man to die in this quiet place—to disappear out of the still valley, and lie in the churchyard with the old people who had gone before him. He saw all this, he thought of all this, and there was no regret in his mind. He did not ask God why it had not been given him to spend the latter days of his life in this peaceful place; he was only thankful that he had once more been allowed to gladden his eyes and his heart.

At last he came to a rude bridge thrown

across the river, and here he rested himself on the frail wooden support. There was a path at this place leading over to the nearest village, and scarcely had he seated himself when a man came along the path, followed by a dog.

"Beggin' your pardon, sir, but what was you a doin' of in them alders?"

"Nothing that I know of, friend," said Glencairn, gravely, "except looking about me. I hope I was doing no ill."

"There' a deal o' poachin' goes on about 'eer, as I've got the snares afore now," said the man—a frank sort of fellow, with a brown, healthy face, sturdy frame, and immense leather leggings.

"I may have my thoughts about poaching, but I am no poacher," replied Glencairn.

"I believe *you*," said the man, with a scrutinizing look; and then, adding, not

to give in too soon, "you weren't at anything o' that sort, for I've bin a seein' of you since you came down by the marshes; but you know we don't like to have the place disturbed—it's hard enough to keep the birds and things together without that."

The preliminary skirmish over, the two men fell to talking about many things—the state of this country, the gangs of poachers who go down from London, and so forth—until at last they came into the rich field of natural history. Glencairn soon had his glass out, lending to the keeper a power of vision he never had before; and in a short time they were together in the alders again, bent upon seeing some curiosity the keeper had discovered on the previous day. They had immediately struck up a friendship; for they were both possessed of a large

acquaintance with the facts of natural history, and also with that careful, inductive, reflective habit of inferring causes from insignificant signs which the one man called scientific method, and the other common sense.

There was no more thought of Oxford Street. Even as one's midnight superstitions vanish with daylight, so was it impossible that the phantom of bankruptcy should have existence in this world of quick life, of whirring wings, and rustling leaves, and plashing water. The horror of debt was a shadow confined to the waking sleep of city life; here such artificial miseries were unknown or forgotten. I believe the accounts of the least imaginative man are lightened and rendered less formidable by a bright warm day that stirs his circulation, clears his brain, and gives him a hopefuller vision.

By-and-by the two men found themselves near a lane.

"If you're agoin' for a walk, sir, and want to go through a wood, you follow this road for 'alf a mile, and go through Darn Wood—or I'll go the length of the ''Are and 'Ounds' with you."

When they arrived at the "Hare and Hounds," they went into the bar, and sat down. The keeper had some ale and a bit of bread and cheese; and Mr. Glencairn had the same, reserving his biscuits for future emergencies. This modest repast being finished, the keeper "airted" his companion towards the lane leading up to Darenth Wood, and then left him.

He walked, slowly and meditatively, up the hill and through the long wood until he at length found himself at Greenhithe. By this time the afternoon had arrived, and along the western sky dark

purple clouds were gathered, which showed here and there a streak of pale green or a dull glow of crimson. A thin mist had fallen over the grey river, and the faint orange lights of the ships were beginning to glimmer through the dusk.

It was well on in the evening when he took the train for London; and he seated himself in the uncomfortable carriage with a shadow on his face. It was the shadow of the town. The unconscious gladness, the bright expression of the forenoon were gone; now there was all the stronger recurrence of that dull sadness which seemed to brood over his eyes.

When he reached home, he was surprised to find his chief clerk there. Mr. Morrison desired to speak with him alone; and so the two men retired to Mr. Glencairn's study; they were there fully half an hour.

When Morrison came out, he went away directly, without waiting to say goodbye to Mrs. Glencairn, with whom he had been talking. When Glencairn, some time thereafter, left his study, and came to take tea with Fanny and her mother, he looked rather pale and fatigued—that was all. He bore his wife's indignant inuendoes without a word; in fact, he seemed to hear and see nothing of what was going on around him.

CHAPTER X.

THE CRISIS.

NEXT morning he went into the city at an early hour, and saw Mr. Morrison again. Then he took a cab—and it was no slight matter suggested such an unusual luxury—and drove to Regent's Park, and afterwards to the Strand, and afterwards to a bank in the city.

About twelve o'clock in the forenoon he returned to his place in Oxford Street; and his usual grave calmness was evidently disturbed by a marked agitation. Another short interview with his clerk ended by his shutting himself up alone in his room,

where he sat down before a bare table, and with his one hand supporting his head he remained for some moments buried in deep meditation. Then he arose, pale and self-possessed.

"Mr. Morrison, I shall be back in an hour."

Ordinary words enough. And this was, after all, only an ironmonger who was in distress for want of money. There were probably several men in Oxford Street that morning who were in quite as great a predicament. And he was only going out, you see, to try to get this money, as anybody else would do.

He went on foot this time, and he took the direction of Russell Square. He went up to one of the houses in that row of stately barracks, and, on asking whether he could see Dr. Huntly, was asked to walk inside, which he did. By-and-by he was

requested to step up to the Doctor's library, where he found a small, thin man, dressed in black, with a bald head, spectacles, and a green shade which covered the spectacles, and half hid his face.

He received Glencairn with much cordiality, but his frankness bore with it an implied respect which any one could have noticed in his tone.

"Doctor," said Glencairn, "I have come to you on a purely business matter. Are you still going on with the —— Scientific Institute?"

"Going on with it!" said the doctor, rubbing the crown of his head as if he wanted to smooth down his hair; "we have got it almost completed. We are going to make you a member, whether you will or no. You must come and see our rooms—our instruments—our library; but that is somewhat scantily furnished as

yet. Sir —— —— has sent us a valuable present; and each of the members is supposed to give us a copy of his own works. You should see our reading-room, too; and that is to be used for our *conversazioni*, if we have any. Then —— and Co. have given us one of their best microscopes, though we have already several; and——"

"Have you got a herbarium yet?"

The man's voice was hard and cold; you would have thought he had some reason for distrusting or hating the man to whom he was speaking.

"That is a point on which I had intended writing you," said the other, taking no heed of his companion's manner. "We have not. I had no idea of the difficulty of procuring a tolerable one, when it was decided that the Institution should have one. Several have been offered to us:

they looked as if they had been got up for a young ladies' seminary. We must have a right good one, or none at all,—one that has been formed by a scientific man, not by a professional plant-collector. Now, Mr. Glencairn, Sir —— —— mentioned your name at our meeting the other day as the man most likely to know where we could get such a thing—a good one, you understand—in short, one like your own."

"I know where you can get one like mine," said the old man, and there was a smile on his thin, determined lips.

Dr. Huntly looked an interrogation.

"You can get it at my house. You can get my own. I—I will sell it to you, if you choose."

"Mr. Glencairn," said the other, anxiously, "I hope you have not misunderstood me. You seem offended—I

assure you I had not the slightest intention of suggesting that you should sell us your herbarium."

"No, Doctor, I don't misunderstand you. I came here to-day with no other intention than that of offering to sell you my herbarium."

"Your own!"

"My own."

"Why, I fancied you would almost part with your life first. I cannot understand your wish to part with it."

"Because you have no wife and child, Doctor; nor yet a business on the brink of ruin. You understand? I have spent too much time over that collection — I have spent the best of my life over it—I have robbed my family to enrich it; — now it shall repay something, you understand? That is, if you are disposed to purchase it."

The little, thin Doctor raised his head so that he could see his companion's face; and when he saw that face, he knew the whole story.

"But this is terrible," said he. "You must not be allowed to throw away the work of your life because of some debt. May I ask how much is the sum you require?"

"I require three hundred pounds before four o'clock: if I do not have it by that time—it is all over with me, so far as my business goes."

"And for three hundred pounds you would sell all this labour? Why, my dear sir, surely you must have one or two friends who would give you the temporary use of so much money."

"I have tried all those whom I have a right to try," said Glencairn, "and now I am here. Pray do not let me lose time by

considering other solutions of the difficulty that I have already considered. God knows how I have kept this back as the very last resource."

"And you are determined, therefore, to sell your herbarium?"

"I am determined."

The Doctor rose from his chair.

"We will go to Sir —— ——; if he is agreeable to the proposal, we may conclude the bargain at once."

In a few moments they were in a hansom, rapidly driving westward. Dr. Huntly told his companion that he might consider the sale of the herbarium as already effected; for, in going downstairs, Glencairn had hinted the sum he was willing to take for it.

He was therefore successful, or likely to be so. Of all the men in debt who had been in Oxford Street that forenoon, he

was probably the only one who had got rid of it so easily. But had you seen him as he sat in this cab, looking at nothing, thinking of many things, you would have said that he did not seem overjoyed with his good fortune. The Doctor was busily speculating as to their being able to get a man to keep this magnificent collection in order; he already saw it adorning a room in the new Institution of which he was so energetic a promoter.

Sir —— was luckily at home; a tall gentleman, also bald, with short black whiskers, and small black eyes under a broad, smooth, white forehead. He, too, was surprised at the decision Glencairn had taken; but endeavoured to persuade him that a better use could not have been made of the collection. He was, indeed, much more eager to secure the prize than Dr. Huntly; and between them they took

it upon themselves, as members of the committee of management, to accept Glencairn's offer.

"We make sure our colleagues will be rejoiced to hear of our purchase," said Sir —— ——, in his somewhat grandiloquent manner. "And you must reflect, Mr. Glencairn, that we do not wholly deprive you of a collection in which you must doubtless take a deep interest. We purpose offering you the honorary membership of the Institution; and you will therefore be able at all times to consult your herbarium, while you will feel pleased to know that its usefulness is no longer confined to one person. At the same time, I am afraid we shall have some difficulty in keeping it up to the line of recent discoveries, until we agree amongst ourselves which of our botanical members will take the task in turn."

Glencairn had scarcely said a word during the interview.

He now rose, and, as he stood with his hat in his hand, he asked his two friends whether it was not possible for them to give him the money at once. Both of the men were painfully struck by the humble tone in which the old man spoke.

"I shall with pleasure give you a cheque on my bankers now," said Sir —— ——, "if that will do. It is but a slight return for the honour you have done us in giving us the first offer; and I am so sure that my colleagues will be delighted to hear of the purchase, that I have no hesitation in taking the whole responsibility of the matter."

He went upstairs, and in a few moments returned with the cheque. Glencairn took the bit of paper in his hands, looked at it, and folded it up slowly and

carefully, but evidently without the least notion of what he was doing. Suddenly he seemed to recover from this reverie. He turned and bade Sir —— good-bye, and then went to the door. There he paused for a moment.

"And — and when will you send for it?" he said.

It. He spoke in a low voice; you would not have detected much agitation in his tone.

"Oh, this evening, perhaps, when we have prepared a place for its reception. Will that do?"

"Yes," said he; and then he went out into the street alone, for Dr. Huntly remained with Sir —— ——, probably to talk over their bargain.

It was about five o'clock in the afternoon when he returned home; and he sat down by the fire, and remained in a sort

of stupor, until tea was brought up. He had had no dinner; but it did not occur to him to mention that.

By this time Mrs. Glencairn had fully informed herself of her husband's movements on the previous day, and nothing could exceed the bitterness of the taunts she now levelled at him. Fanny, indeed, dared not speak; so much was she afraid of giving her mother an opportunity to reply with those cutting sarcasms. She saw, also, that her father was more than usually preoccupied; and that he did not even take the trouble to rebuke those slight irreverences which Mrs. Glencairn, in her most angry moods, used as the last means of revenging herself upon her husband.

Tea over, Glencairn retired to his study. There were two or three loose sheets lying about which belonged to the herbarium:

these he replaced. He then, with some little search, discovered one or two which he took out from the collection, and carefully laid on the table. The writing underneath the latter plants was clearly not his own.

But, on second thoughts, he returned to the shelves, and began looking through a few more genera. Many of the rarest of the specimens had been given to him by friends, some of whom were now dead, and their names written at the corner of the sheet seemed to be the last monuments of those old friendships. He began to lay aside one or two, then one or two more; finally he stopped and turned to look at the number of those he had already selected. A sad look came over his face. These sheets had been taken from only a few genera: if he were to go down through the shelves after this fashion, he would

soon have half the herbarium on the table. So he calmly took the sheets in his hand, and put all of them back—except one. That one bore on the corner of it these words, written in a girl's hand,—

"*Listera ovata:* Bird's-nest, or Tway-blade.

"Gathered by H. M. for J. G.

"Gourock, 28th July, 18——."

He cut this memorandum off the sheet, and, carefully folding it, put it in his purse. He gummed on another strip of paper, wrote the name of the specimen and the place of its growth upon it, and put the sheet back into its generic cover. He had not kept back a single plant from the —— Scientific Institution.

He returned to the parlour.

"Is there anything vexing you, papa,

that you should look so sad?" asked Fanny.

"Yes," said her mother, sharply, "some bit of weed has gone astray—that is the only thing likely to cause him vexation. A wife and child may starve; but every attention and every moment of time must be devoted to a pressful of dried plants. It is a fine thing to live for. I tell you," she continued, turning to her husband, "that many a woman would have set fire to the trash before seeing herself and her only child made beggars. You seem to think that God has bade you gather up all that withered rubbish that He himself allows to lie and rot. You have no care but for that; and I believe you would sell us, and the house, and the business to-morrow morning, if you could only buy another buttercup with the money."

Why did he not answer? Because in the middle of her tirade, there had come a rapping from the front door. She had scarcely finished when the maid-servant stepped in, and handed her master a letter.

He took it and read it.

"Tell the men to come up," he said.

Their heavy tread on the wooden stairs sounded like the horrid tramp of the undertaker's men when they come to carry away a coffin and its inmate from the silent house. Every step smote upon his heart; but when the men appeared, he rose, steady as a rock, and, in a calm, impassive voice, he asked them to follow him into the study.

Mrs. Glencairn was frightened; and Fanny herself was oppressed with some vague misgivings, which her father's recent manner had already suggested.

Mrs. Glencairn had a suspicion of what was going to happen, and almost considered it a judgment upon her intemperate speech.

After some time the men came to clear a passage through the parlour by removing the central table and some chairs. Then they carried the herbarium, which was completely swathed with ropes, to the landing, and down the stairs, and out into the large furniture van in the street, Mr. Glencairn following. He waited until the van rumbled away into the darkness; and then, without addressing a word to his wife, he went back to the empty room, and shut himself in.

The solitary candle shone into the great blank space which the herbarium had occupied, and showed only dust and cobwebs. But the old man sat there, so still that you could have heard his watch

tick, staring into the empty corner as if it were full of pictures.

And perhaps it was—pictures of happy springs, and bleak blue winters, and yellow autumns, of old scenes, and old faces, and old sunsets among the Highland hills. One face, of all the others, may have been more present to him; for as he sat there, large tears rolled down his wasted, brown cheeks, silent and unheeded.

CHAPTER XI.

THE FACE.

IT is the morning of Christmas Day, 1865. Mr. Helstone is seated by his dining-room fire, lying back in a reading-chair, with a volume of Spanish ballads before him, a cigar in his hand, and some coffee on the table by his side.

But he is not reading. He is looking into the fire, and there is a smile on his lips.

Presently Mrs. Miguel appears at the door of the room, and ushers in Miss Fanny, who is brisk and rosy with the cold—or she blushes somewhat—or else

she has been walking quickly. At all events there is a fine glow upon her pretty, oval face, which rests so snugly on the thick light-grey woollen shawl that is drawn closely round her neck, and the magnificent head of curls. She is charming; and Mr. Helstone tells her so, in his quiet way, when Mrs. Miguel has retired.

"And I have good news for you," she says.

"And I have better news for you," he replies, cheerfully, as he helps to unwind her from the voluminous shawl.

"It is not possible."

"You shall hear. I got a letter yesterday from my uncle—he meant it to reach me this morning, but those country people always blunder. And do you know what he has given me as a present? Only a lot of houses in the neighbourhood of Ludgate Hill—that's all. As villainous-looking a

piece of property as ever you saw, for I visited the place yesterday; but when the present leases run out—about six months hence—these horrible old buildings will give me seven hundred a year. That is my news: and yours, Fanchette?"

"Better far. When I go upstairs I will tell you. I cannot remain here, and have myself scented so that mamma may know where I have been."

He threw his cigar into the grate; and they went upstairs into the large drawing-room, where she took one easy-chair by the fireplace and he another. She crossed her hands on her knees, and assumed an expression of much gravity, as she began to relate her story. She knew that her position was particularly artistic and graceful, and that the colouring about her face, and head, and neck was delicious when contrasted with the silvery-

grey dress she wore—for so much Charlie had taught her.

"You are to dine with us to-day," she said.

"Indeed, I shall be very glad."

"Is that all you have to say to me for my long, long struggle? Have you no better thanks? Have you no idea of all that I have suffered to bring this about, and make you and mamma friends again? Oh, you do not know what cruel things that smooth-looking mamma can say at times, or you would think me a Joan of Arc."

"I do," he said; "I think you have the bravery of a dozen generals. Not for a thousand pounds would I have attempted what you have done; I do not know any man who would have attempted it."

"That is right. You always please me

when you seem conscious of my value. Now let me tell you all that you must do this evening, so as to secure mamma's favour."

She entered into a long and minute description of how he was to behave, what he was to say, and what he was to avoid saying, until he was fairly lost in astonishment at the extraordinary and subtle power which his companion possessed.

"It is not the result of study, but of intuition," he thought, "which is our big name for all the knowledge we amass by unconscious study. The girl ought to have been an empress; and she would have had Europe at her feet."

"But," she said, with a gravity which was not assumed, "you must be prepared for a great change in papa. You will scarcely know him. Ever since that

terrible night when his plants were carried out of the house, he has been quite another being. He seldom speaks. He goes up and down the house with a sort of vague restlessness, and looks at books without reading them, and sits thinking for hours together."

"Why does he not set to work to form another herbarium?"

"How could he, at his age? Besides, many of those plants were given him by friends, and had a special value. He could never think of forming another. He has not entered his study once since the day his plants left—not once. His microscope and other things are being wasted; I try to keep the ferns alive by watering them, but they don't look as they used to look; and he allows us to do what dusting we like without watching us as he always did."

"That is a temporary despondency or lethargy from which he can be easily wakened."

"Not in this world. Mamma is always talking of what will happen to us when he dies; and I don't think she would be very sorry. I know she is glad he does not use the study any more. She has swept all his books and instruments into one corner, and occupies the rest of the place as a sort of lumber-room."

"Fanny, your mother is a very terrible woman—really a terrible woman. She does not look a picturesque or dramatic person; and yet I sometimes shudder when I think of her. There are possibilities in such a nature that frighten me."

"And in my nature do the same possibilities lie?"

"You are too much of a kitten to have such a nature."

"But I may grow a cat."

"You are too much of a pigeon, then."

"And you are the hawk, are you not? Then we shall have our happy family to-day sitting down to dinner together: you the hawk, I the pigeon, my mother the—the cat; my father—but what shall I call him? I never look at his sad face now, and his deep, kind eyes, without thinking of Christ. He has the same expression that I can see in a picture of Christ that Charlie gave me. It makes me miserable to think of the cheerless days he passes; and if it should be that he——"

But she did not finish the sentence: how could she on Christmas morning?

"And what of Charlie?" asked Helstone, to change the subject.

"Poor Charlie!" she said, as she looked out of the window with a vague

dreaminess in her eyes. "This is the first Christmas for many a year that he has not spent with us. Everything seems altered now — and sadder than it was. Shall I be as comfortable this afternoon as I used to be long ago, when he used to come and treat me like his little sister?"

"You are very ungrateful, Fanny, for all the good fortune that has come to us this Christmas."

"Charlie is going to spend the day with his uncle—that old soldier, you know,—but I fancy he would gladly have gladly broken the engagement if we had asked him. Mamma could not ask him, you see, because you were coming; and you ought to think very well of me for having sacrificed poor Charlie."

"Poor Charlie still looks upon you as his future wife, doubtless."

"I am afraid so."

She went to the piano, and, sitting down, began to sing a stupid drawing-room ballad with such semblance of emotional expression—and she had a very pretty talent that way—as almost to make the thing sound like music. It was a ballad of the affections; and she was supposed to throw aside whole handfuls of jewels in order to marry her true love. Her true love was probably either a minstrel or a shepherd; the two beings whom alone, at the singing period of their career, young ladies think it not degrading to accept as their husband. Afterwards, when miss descends to the realities of life, the shepherd she loves turns out to be a groom, or the minstrel whom she runs away with is an Italian opera-singer with black eyes and a greasy face.

"Thank you," said Helstone.

He crossed the room, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"You are still fond of Charlie," he said. "You are the only woman I ever knew who could retain her tenderness for a man whom she had injured."

"And I admire you very much for not being angry with me for being fond of him," she said.

"Admire is a pretty word," he replied, with a smile, "in plays. It is the affectionately respectful word used by all the young clerks who write letters to the soubrette of a theatre."

"You are never satisfied," she retorted; "and if life had been a little harder to you, you would not have acquired the habit of being so delicately particular and sensitive in such trifles."

This was one of the random-shots which he had often observed her firing

off without the least deliberation, without seemingly the consciousness of the truth which they implied.

Shortly after she made ready to go; and went downstairs to get her hat and shawl. When she was dressed, however, he asked her to take a walk round the garden, and judge whether her latest instructions had been attended to. So they passed outside, and went down the damp, cold path together, amid the poor withered remnants of the year's flowers and leaves.

When they had reached the summer-house, she pointed out some straggling branches which had not been snipped off with sufficient care, and which consequently gave the place an untidy appearance. Having scolded him soundly, she dispatched him for a pair of scissors; and while he was gone, she stepped into

the summer-house to look through the coloured panes of glass in the windows.

These large panes were of different tints; so that, in summer-time, when all the trees were in leaf, the meadow green, and the sky bright, all that one had to do to produce a picture of the most desolating wintry cheerlessness, bleakness, and gloominess, was to look through the dull blue pane. The transformation was so rapid and so effective as to strike a chill into the least sensitive person. In like manner, there was a lurid red pane, which changed the landscape outside into a glorious, glowing sunset, dazzling at once to the eyes and to the mind. There was a yellow pane, which produced in winter all the softness of a warm summer evening; and there was a green pane, too, which was meant to show the cold bright life of spring; but in this case the tint

was wrong, and only produced a magical pantomimic effect.

At the corner of the garden, outside the wall, stood a large whitethorn tree. It was much taller, of course, than the wall at the end of the garden, which was low in order to secure the view across the meadow; but it was only a few feet higher than the side wall, which was of a height to shut out all prying eyes from Mr. Helstone's enclosure. Fanny was looking through the yellow pane in the window, trying to fancy that the splendid glow she saw really existed, and that she was again among the warm breathings and rich luxuriance of summer. The very effort dazed her with old memories, when suddenly she saw the figure of a woman come from behind this whitethorn tree, approach the wall, and look round the garden.

She was too terrified to stir, or even to scream. She saw that this woman was the same woman who had frightened Helstone on the dreadful night when her father was run over by the cab. She saw this at once —though the yellow glass shade threw a strange colouring on the eager face that was bent over the wall. The woman seemed disappointed, looked for a second in the direction of the summer-house, and then withdrew.

Fanny trembled in every limb. This was what Helstone had seen—what he never would speak about—what he dreaded even mentioning, so strong was the effect of the recollection on his nerves. What should she do? At the very moment she heard the sound of his footsteps on the path; and, scarcely knowing what she was about, turned to the window to hide her perturbation. Concealment is the first

effort of all animals in danger: she had no time to gather herself together, assume a moral courage, and tell him boldly what she had seen.

"Here are the scissors, Fanchette."

"Do it yourself. I am delighted with these views," she said, as she rested her fingers on the small window-ledge to prevent his seeing how they trembled.

She could not collect her thoughts sufficiently to reason about the matter; her only and engrossing anxiety was to conceal her agitation and escape.

She did both successfully, and in a few moments she was out of the house, and going home. Now she began to reflect a little. Helstone was evidently so afraid of this thing that the superstitious dread was communicated to her: why she did not know. She resolved, however, never to take upon herself the responsibility of

speaking of it to him; never to utter a word about it to a human being. But not the less did she ponder over it and puzzle herself with it, until she had produced almost as great a nervous disquietude in herself as afflicted Helstone.

CHAPTER XII.

RECONCILIATION.

AT five o'clock that afternoon Mr. Helstone was admitted to Mrs. Glencairn's parlour. She and her daughter were there by themselves.

Fanny rose quickly, with a slight flush of anxiety on her face, as Helstone advanced, with perfect self-possession, and held out his hand to Mrs. Glencairn. The grand, cold woman shook hands with him in a limp manner, and in answer to his inquiries said,

"Thank you, I am very well. I fear I may be in the way for a long time yet."

"First gun," thought Helstone, as he

quietly seated himself, and sought refuge in that divine institution, the weather.

Fanny did her very best to bring the two into agreeable conversation; and manifested a sublime and heroic indifference to her personal safety by coming in between both fires. She was very angry that Helstone did not strive to make himself more pleasant; although in all other matters he carefully obeyed her instructions. As for Mrs. Glencairn, she relinquished her first hostility of attitude, and it was only occasionally that the chance of saying something bitter tempted her.

When dinner was ready, and they had gone into another room, it was found necessary to call Mr. Glencairn in from the garden, round which he had been walking in the dark. Helstone was at once struck with the marked alteration in his appearance and manner, of which Fanny had

spoken. His old erect bearing, his kindly gravity, his humorous speeches were all gone: there remained only a dull despondency, which was marked too deeply on his eyes and cheeks. Even his dress was dingier and more awkward than before; he sat down at the table in a faded grey shooting-coat, and with a necktie which almost hid his crumpled collar.

Not only had Fanny superintended the preparation of this dinner, but she had now to supply nearly all the conversation required to make it go. Mr. Glencairn seemed disinclined to talk; Mrs. Glencairn had not quite got rid of her stiffness; and the young people had therefore a hard time of it. It was in vain that Helstone tried to do his very best; that he told stories; that he endeavoured to drag Mr. Glencairn into an argument. Only once was he successful; and that was when he

began talking of the origin of Christmas Day as a national festivity.

"You don't keep Christmas Day in Scotland, I understand," said he to Mr. Glencairn.

"No," said Mrs. Glencairn, with a sneer, "it would be too expensive."

"But it is pleasant to see Christianity translated into social customs by the popular mind, and made the origin of mutual forgiveness, and kindness, and all those graceful virtues that Christmas Day celebrates. And who can wonder that Christianity so easily commended itself to the nations of the world when, instead of the old utilitarianism of heathenism, they found a religion that was practically the gospel of the rights of the weak? Now the weak are always the majority of a country, and of course this religion was seized upon with avidity."

"Christianity was the voice of God, and men heard it," said James Glencairn.

"But the voice of God has in all ages been heard through the mouths of human agents, and they have been more or less successful in delivering their message according to their own imperfections, or according to the view they took of their duty."

Of course this was the signal for a contest, which lasted some time, and awoke Glencairn from his lethargy. Mr. Helstone, according to his instructions, was quite orthodox; although there was always sufficient in his argument to leave ground for an attack. This discussion cleared the air somewhat, and the dinner passed off as well as could have been expected; notwithstanding that Mrs. Glencairn had her temper ruffled by the spilling of some sauce on the table-cover.

After dinner, however, a great change took place. Mr. Helstone, in the course of conversation, intimated to them the unexpected good fortune that had befallen him, and from that moment Mrs. Glencairn became more affable and friendly. Seven hundred a year of settled income was to her imagination a prodigious sum —a fortune she had often longed for, and never enjoyed. What if Fanny were to be translated from this misty region of poverty into a brighter and hopefuller sphere, where no phantom of necessity could haunt her path?

Mrs. Glencairn became very friendly indeed with Mr. Helstone. He was quite surprised, and not a little pleased. Fanny was delighted, and never allowed the conversation to die down into those pauses of reflection which are apt to damp the ardour of a reconciliation by the recalling of old memories.

Mr. Glencairn remained apart from the others, and almost silent. Helstone was astonished to find that the mesmeric influence of the old man seemed to have gone from him. There was no longer the spiritual power in his look, the prophetic thrill in his mournful voice, to which he had been accustomed. He, Helstone, now met Glencairn on equal ground; was not overawed by him; almost pitied him.

On the whole, therefore, the reader may suppose there was not much hilarity and *abandon* at this small Christmas party; but at least there was a moderate share of pleasure and satisfaction.

And it was to have a much more important effect on the lives of those present than any one of them would have fancied.

Mr. Glencairn having retired to another room—*not* his study—Fanny also left the room, and Helstone held a long conver-

sation with her mother. Apparently they established a good understanding between them; for when Fanny returned they were chatting very cheerfully about the relative merits of town and country houses.

The evening passed very pleasantly. When Helstone, at a late hour, rose to go, Fanny followed him downstairs and into the passage, and spoke to him for a few moments while he put on his top-coat.

"You have behaved very well," she whispered. "And mamma, what does she say?"

"I have got on as well as could be expected," he said, "but she is not quite won over. You know, it is no principle, but only the conventionalism of respectability, which stands in the way of our mutual agreement; but that is very strong

in a woman like her. With a little time, if she continues in her present mood, we are safe."

"You have no hope of converting papa?" she asked, anxiously.

"I took several months to convert you; I may occupy several more in converting your mamma; but I cannot undertake your father. He is of too tough a material to be welded by argument. And yet he seems to have lost all his former spirit; I was not afraid of his quiet sayings as I used to be."

"I shall never be happy," she said, "never, until papa tells me that we are right."

"I should be sorry to think so," said Helstone, with some solicitude; but at this moment the creaking of a door upstairs was heard. Helstone put on his hat, and, with a kindly goodbye to Fanny, hurried out into the cold night air.

CHAPTER XIII.

MOTHER MIGUEL.

DURING all the long winter and spring which followed this reconciliation, it is to be supposed that Mrs. Glencairn's conversion was in progress. Everything else seemed sufficiently stationary. Helstone came to Glencairn's house but rarely; somehow he and Glencairn did not get on well together. Charlie came but rarely, for he was busy at his painting, hoping by a strong effort to wrest from fortune that success she had so long denied him.

His relations with Fanny continued in their ordinary vacillating, unsatisfactory

state. She was very distant in her manner towards him; but this he attributed to her displeasure at being obliged to wait in expectation of this better prospect which did not come any nearer. For the rest, she had not revoked her promise to become his wife, so soon as he was able to risk the step.

In two particulars only had the winter produced any alteration. One was in Glencairn's business, which, relieved for a period by the sale of the herbarium, was rapidly falling again into difficulties. The other was in Mrs. Miguel's bearing towards Fanny.

At first, it will be remembered, the old woman was delighted with the opportunity of meeting this pretty creature whom she had nursed; and she was glad to see those visits of hers to Mr. Helstone's house repeated. In process of time, however, she began to receive Fanny

with evident constraint, sometimes with scarcely concealed aversion. Fanny saw this dislike, and still she continued to come. Her visits occurred at all hours; and lasted longer than they had done. She made no pretence now of calling to see Mrs. Miguel; she asked for Mr. Helstone as a matter of course; and if he was not in, she entered and waited, making herself perfectly at home. In fact, she had occasionally suggested to Mrs. Miguel certain alterations in the arrangement of the furniture; and when these improvements were by chance neglected, Mr. Helstone was sure to take the matter in hand and enforce her orders. By little and little she came to be the mistress of the house; and the servants fell into the habit of so considering her.

It was not, however, her assumption of authority which alarmed and troubled Mrs. Miguel; the worthy woman would

have been delighted to become in any way the servant of the daughter of her old mistress. It was a fear that those visits, which she herself had encouraged, had been productive of no good to the young girl, which oppressed her and gave her many a secret and anxious thought. She knew not what to do in the matter. She was afraid of going to Mrs. Glencairn. She determined to tell somebody, however—some one who knew the family well enough to interfere, and save the girl from harm, if that were still possible. So she secretly resolved; but the days and weeks passed, and she saw no one whom she could acquaint with her disquietude.

As ill-luck would have it, she at length lit upon the person who ought to have been the last to hear of these suspicions.

It was Charlie Bennett.

One morning she happened to be out on some errand in the Clapham Road. Charlie had come over to see Fanny before going into the country. It was now the beginning of April, and he was anxious to catch the first richnesses of spring on his canvas. Fanny, when he called, had gone for her accustomed solitary walk to Clapham Common; and he, as he had been used to do in their old days of friendship—before the shadow of Helstone had been thrown across the household—walked leisurely after her, hoping to overtake her or meet her on her return. So it was that he met Mrs. Miguel.

The old woman recognized him at once; and remembered him as the boyish sweetheart of Fanny, and the common pet of the family. He, too, recognised the features of the old nurse; and as everybody who had had anything to do with

Fanny possessed for him a sort of sacredness, he stopped at once to speak to her.

It was an unlucky pause. No sooner did Mother Miguel learn the intimacy which still existed between him and the Glencairns, than she seized upon him as the proper person to relieve her of this oppressive secret. In her anxiety to lessen her responsibility, she did not stay to consider whether the boyish lover might not have preserved his affection, and be even then Fanny's sweetheart.

Three minutes after she saw it all, however. Three minutes afterward, when he dragged her into a side street, and with ashen lips and cheek, was conjuring her to speak the truth, she knew the blunder she had made, and she shrank affrighted from the consequences.

She was so terrified by his extraordinary agitation that she tried to prevaricate.

But she had fairly lost her wits. In her confusion she revealed more and more; until the young man who now confronted her seemed wholly paralysed and appalled by the terrible consistency of her story. He tried to recover from his weakness; he turned upon her with a savage look in his eyes, as he said,

"You have told me all this, Mrs. Miguel. Do you think I believe it? No. I believe you have lied—lied every word of it. Why did you do so? What devil prompted you to tell such a lie?——"

"I haven't told no lie—I—I will swear it," she said, in a terrible fright. "You needn't look at me so, sir—it is not a lie—it is true what I have told you, every word, as true as there is a God above us."

"Do you think I am a fool?" he said. "If it is money you want, can't you ask

it without swearing away your soul with such a parcel of lies."

"God forgive you, sir, for supposin' as I wanted money from you or any one, when I wanted to do my best by the poor girl, knowing of her father and mother these many a year. Money! Did I hever ask you for money? It may be a sad story for you, but leastways it wasn't my fault—no more than I was too hanxious to have her come to the 'ouse——"

She found Charlie was not listening to a word she said. He was breathing hurriedly and interruptedly, as if something was choking him, and then he suddenly caught hold of the top of the stone wall beside him.

"You're not well, sir——"

"Go away," he said, in a strange voice; "I am well enough. Go away, and ask God to forgive you for telling these lies."

She looked at him once, and tears started to her eyelids.

"I was never accused of that afore," she said, "and I shouldn't be now when I'm a-doin' my best. I suppose you have your reasons for not wishin' to believe it; and you may say of me what you like; but if you'd only ask Mrs. Glencairn not to let Miss Fanny come out alone so regular, without intin' hanything——"

"Perhaps you have not told lies," he said, hurriedly. "You may have been deceived. I will find out."

He walked away from her, rapidly, as if he wanted to be out of her reach. Then as rapidly he walked back, and found her almost at the same spot. The poor woman had remained there, bewildered and wretched, wishing she had said nothing, and wondering whether there

were any means of escape from the consequences of what she had done.

"Show me your master's house," said Charlie.

She walked on, and he went with her.

"You say she is always there about this time?"

"You wouldn't go up to the 'ouse, sir?" said the woman, in great alarm, and stopping instantly.

"No," said Charlie, "go on."

She took him to the corner of Larkhall Lane, from which he could see the house; and there she besought him to go no further. She herself walked down to the place, and entered; and then, when she had disappeared, Charlie stole a little nearer.

There was the figure of a girl within the shadow of the room. He went a little nearer, saw that it was Fanny, and stood

motionless and rigid, with one hand catching the railings of the garden.

She passed further into the shadow of the room, and he turned and walked away —unsteadily, as if he had no power to direct his steps.. He entered a public-house, passed into the parlour, and called for some brandy.

It was a dingy little room, without a fire, and saturated with stale smoke. He was alone; and when the lad had brought him the brandy and gone back to the bar, he sat down by the table in an old wooden arm-chair.

He drank nothing. His right hand grasped the top of the wine-glass, and his elbow rested on the table.

For nearly a quarter of an hour he remained in this posture, mute and immovable, with his teeth tight together, his eyes fixed on the table before him, and

the veins on each side of his forehead marked and swollen. Suddenly there was a loud crash, some splinters of crystal fell on the floor, and when he lifted his hand, he found a deep gash in the palm, from which blood was flowing profusely. The nervous tension of his fingers had crushed the glass they had held between them.

He allowed the blood to run a little, then he took out his handkerchief and managed to tie it round his right palm with the aid of his left hand and his teeth, after which he relapsed into that stolid position which betokened so much outward impassibility, and so much and intense inward agitation.

He rose and left, paying for the brandy and the glass as he went out. His eyes seemed to be dazzled by the glare of the light; he walked on, as if in a dream, and continued walking until he had arrived in

Oxford Street. He went to the shop of the dealer who had bought the pictures from him which Marie had ordered.

"I want five pounds from that money you owe me, Mr. Burgess."

"Well, really, Mr. Bennett, you see, things have gone so badly of late, that——"

"I want it very particularly; I shall not ask you for the rest of the money until you are quite prepared. The fact is, I am going into the country."

"You've been ill, sir, I see," said Mr. Burgess, as he proceeded to get the five sovereigns out of his greasy purse.

With these in his left hand, Charlie walked on until he came to a gunsmith's. Here he purchased a revolver and a box of cartridges; and put the case under his arm.

Then he went to a doctor's, and had

the wound in his hand dressed. Fortunately no tendons had been cut.

When he arrived at his lodgings, he found a brother artist seated in the cheerless room, endeavouring to render it a little more comfortable by smoking a clay pipe. He had also taken down from the wall a scarlet petticoat which was one of Charlie's "properties," and had wrapped it round his shoulders.

"By Jove, Charlie," he said, "my room is cold enough, but it is never quite so bad as this. I should be forced to pay for fires in spite of myself if I lived in such a house. Why, it is—but what's the matter with you? You are as white as a stage ghost."

"I have cut my hand, and lost a little blood—that is all."

"Let me see what you've done."

"Look here, Tom," said Charlie, after a

moment's embarrassment, "I've got something troubling me. I'd only bore you if you waited; and I—well, I want to be by myself. You won't——"

"Think it rude if you ask me to go? Certainly not. I'll come and see you again—as soon as you have got coals, or the weather changes. Poor devil!" he added to himself, as he went downstairs, "he is suffering the punishment nature inflicts on all who want to marry."

Charlie spent that afternoon in reading letters and looking over old papers, sketches, and memoranda which lay in his desk. Many of these letters—written long ago, in that sweet time when love and confidence were as yet indissoluble—he knew by heart; so often had he read through those delicious, childish outpourings, those wayward fancies, and descriptions of subtle emotions—so often

had he hungered over their endearing phrases, and yielded himself up to the intoxication they produced. Some of these letters were long epistles of eight and ten pages, carefully crossed from beginning to end; some were brief notes, pencilled on scraps of paper, with such vague messages as "*Darling, come to me.*" "*Is not mamma cruel to-night?*" "*To-morrow I will meet you at eleven.*" "*Don't forget to be at church on Sunday.*" And similar all-important jottings. Many a time there was a mist of tears before his eyes; but more frequently he paused in a sort of cold, terrible wonder to consider whether it were possible that the heart which had given utterance to these phrases could ever turn and address them to another.

CHAPTER XIV.

SAVED BY A SONG.

IN the morning you would have thought he had quite recovered his self-composure. He took his breakfast as usual. He then sat down at the other side of the table, and wrote as follows:—

"*Thursday morning.*

"Dear Uncle,—If you get this letter, you will understand that I have done what you would have done in my place. The lady whom I hoped to make my wife has been ruined by a man who took the most cowardly means of ruining her.

He debauched her mind first; the rest followed of course. I am going now to revenge myself and her by shooting him. If I succeed, I will also shoot myself. I have no message to leave, or anything to ask you to do for me—except this. Tell Marie that it was my ill-fortune never to be able to let her know how much I loved her; how I thought of her as a good spirit hovering over me, whom I dared not look at, for my eyes were weak and blind; and that now, when I am so near the end of my life, I begin to see what it might have been and what it has been. I know of no one whom I can ask to remember me except yourself and her.

"CHARLES BENNETT."

He addressed this letter to Major Von Kirschenfeld, and placed it in a drawer, beneath a lot of papers.

He then opened the pistol-case, took out the revolver, and put one of the greased copper cartridges in each of the chambers. The pistol was not a large one, and went easily into his top-coat pocket.

He was about to leave the house, when he suddenly turned back again. It occurred to him that the collar he wore must be dirty, although he had not looked at it on putting it on. A few moments sufficed to replace the collar with a clean one, and then he walked out.

His landlady asked him when he should return.

"Towards the afternoon, most likely," he said.

He walked all the way across to Clapham, so that it was nearly twelve o'clock when he arrived at Larkhall Lane.

Once, in passing a street leading into Clapham Road, he fancied he saw his uncle's brougham being driven southward; but the glimpse he caught of the coachman was almost momentary. He could not, of course, see who was inside; but he remembered that Marie not unfrequently drove over to see a lady, a friend of her father's, who lived at the south-west corner of the Common.

He thought no more of the matter.

As he neared Helstone's house, he moderated his pace; and his breathing came and went a little harder than it had done. That was the only sign of emotion he displayed. His right hand, still with the narrow bandage round it, remained in his coat-pocket; and he walked slowly along, apparently regarding with a vague attention the thin long threads of white cloud that streaked the

pale blue of the sky down near the horizon.

He walked past the turning which led towards the house—he walked on until he was at the Common, and then he turned. There was more determination in his face. He passed rapidly down the lane, and strode up to the front of the house.

He was concealed by the height of some bushes in the front garden, and he paused at the railings by the side of the gate. At the same moment he heard the sound of a piano so sharply and distinctly that, looking up, he saw one of the windows on the upper storey half open. The air had grown suddenly mild this morning; perhaps the people inside were glad to greet in this way its warmth and freshness.

Then there arose the sweet singing of a girl's voice;—not a clear, high voice, but

one full of softness and tenderness. How well he knew it! He trembled from head to foot as he heard it—trembled as with an ague. What was it she sang?—

"O where were ye sae late yestreen,
My bonnie Jeanie Gray?
Your faither missed ye late at e'en,
And syne at break o' day."

A flush of blood came over his pale face, and the veins of his hands were swollen as with liquid fire. And while he shivered as with intense cold, there was perspiration on his forehead, and the palms of his hands became hot and clammy.

"O sister, sit ye doon by me,
And let naebody ken;
For I hae promised late yestreen,
To wed young Jamie Glen."

Why, *he* had been Jamie Glen in those bygone, sad, too well remembered days.

Had she not often sung the song to him, and told him in those expressive tones of hers what she would scarcely repeat in plainer speech? He could not hear her very distinctly, but his knowledge of the song helped him, and he understood it all:—

"The melting tear was in his e'e,
What heart could say him nay?
As aft he vowed, 'Through life I'm thine,
My bonnie Jeanie Gray!'"

Then there was silence; followed by a light laugh which rankled along his brain. And yet he said to himself—in two or three brief moments of indecision that encompassed a lifetime of torture—"She is singing. She is happy. She is contented with her horrible debasement. Shall I step in and deprive her of the poor happiness she is likely to have in this world? I should not revenge her; I

should cruelly harm her; and God knows how far that has always been from my thought. Ought I to show her the pit into which she has fallen? —should I debase her in her own sight? —should I crush her with the scorn of all pure women and honourable men? Alas! she is sufficiently punished—I cannot interfere if she is content to be as she is."

So he reasoned with himself, calmly enough; but all the same the air was choking him: there was fire in his temples, and there was a great, struggling pain in his throat. But he kept down that pain; and he held his head erect; and as he walked away, he would not acknowledge to himself that great tears were rolling down his cheeks.

A lady and her little girl passed him; and the little girl looked up, awe-struck, into his face.

He went onward towards the Common, unconscious of the mild air, and the breezy sunlight, and the broad shadows which were blowing over it. He came to one of the ponds, and, taking the pistol from his pocket, looked at it for a second, and then threw it, with a shudder, into the water. There was a splash, some ripples, and silence.

He sat down on a seat which was placed under a neighbouring tree; but an unusual restlessness dragged him up again and drove him on. He passed over to Clapham Road, and turned his face towards the City. He had not walked there above five minutes when a brougham, coming down the road, was suddenly drawn up within a few yards of him.

He turned, saw Marie's eyes smiling to him from the window, and shrank back.

"I am not fit to go near you," he said to himself.

A slight surprise passed over the young girl's face, but she still looked as though she expected him to go over, and at length he was constrained to do so.

She shook hands with him, and said—

"Are you going home, Charlie? Papa has been wishing to see you for two or three days back. Will you come now?"

He felt himself drawn towards her by the frank kindness of her voice—he felt a sort of safety in being near her. He opened the door and got into the carriage; and it was not until he was seated inside that she recognised the strong marks of agitation which were on his face.

"Have you been unwell, Charlie?" she asked.

"No—" he stammered, "not unwell.

I have been—but you will not ask me, for you, Marie, have always been my best friend."

He spoke passionately, and caught her hand in his.

"I hope we shall always be friends," she said, drawing away her hand gently.

When they reached home, Kirschenfeld was, as usual, surrounded by a pile of German newspapers. He rose and welcomed Charlie cordially, while Marie went upstairs to take her bonnet off.

"How do the pictures get on? You make money yet? I tell you what you do in any case—you whiten your cheek and kill yourself before your time."

"And if I choose to kill myself, I suppose I may," said Charlie, in an irritated voice—for indeed the lad did not know what he was about.

"Why not kill yourself to some pur-

pose? All my friends at home will be going off to kill or be killed in a few months—do not I see it? You have seen the proposal of our Preussen to the Bund? You know what it means? You know that we in Germany want no more to be led by the priests of Francis Joseph, but by the schoolmasters of our King William. I tell you all Germany looks for that, and Preussen knows it; and she makes the trial in one, two months hence, and you see whether the good drill, and good education, and free spirit of the north does not crush out these bigot people of the south, with their stupid princes at the head of the army, with their millinery officers, and their soldiers who are soldiers because they are too poor to buy the—how you call it?—the exemption. And all that comes now—and I remain here!"

He sucked more fiercely at his long cigar-tube; and then he rose, and strode up and down the room, erect and angry-looking, as he always did when he was excited.

"I hear it on every side now," he continued; and if Charlie had been less preoccupied, he would have noticed that the Major had something very particular to address to him when he allowed himself to speak in English in the forenoon—"I hear from every quarter of their arming. You believe not that story of the Austrian troops in Böhmen being moved about for fear of the Jews—that is a lie. They prepare for our Preussen. And what has she done? Not much: she knows who can mobilize her army in a moment. But she has garrisoned her fortresses for war—Neisze down there in Schlesien, and Glatz, and at Magdeburg, too, and Wit-

temberg, and Spandau, and Torgau, and Cosel. Oh, we know what the movement against the Jews means—and so does Italy;—she arms, too, and you will see her take Rome, and drive the Pope to Schönbrunn, and you will see her take Venetia; and France, instead of being angry, will be glad to get out of her difficulty with the September Convention. Well, that I don't know much of; but Preussen—I know what she does, for herself, and for the whole of Deutschland. Gott in Himmel, I cannot rest here longer —I must go. And Marie—what will my Marie do?"

The strong lion wrestled with these bonds that accident had woven around him; but how was he to break them? At this moment Marie entered the room.

"Come here, my girl."

She went up to her father, and he drew

her towards him, pushed back the rich brown hair from her fine, intellectual forehead, and looked down into the sweet upturned face.

"Marie, you are a German: what will you do for Germany? She could not have given modern Europe all its learning, and literature, and music, unless she had had children like you, willing to suffer to make her great. And now she goes to remodel Europe—to put down feudalism, to spread her land-laws, and her education, and her wise institutions over Europe—all that costs pain, and life. What will you do, Marie? You must help."

"I know what you mean," she said, and there were tears in her eyes.

"You know? You are willing? And you and I do what we can for our country. When all our friends are doing something, how shall we rest in idleness?"

"Have you not done enough?" she asked, looking up into his eyes. "Have you not the right to rest now, and let younger men fight for Germany?"

"Herr Major," said Charlie, in a harsh, dry voice, "you said you would feel justified in remaining with Marie if I would go to this war. Very well, I will go."

"Give me your hand, Junge!" cried the old man, in rapid German; "we will go together!"

"No," said Charlie, coldly, "if you go, I will stay by Marie."

The girl stood between them, pale and frightened.

"Marie!" said her father.

She looked almost wildly from one to the other; for that word demanded the sharp trial of decision. Which of them should she deliver over to death?—so in

her terror she interpreted her choice. She took her father's hand.

"Let Charlie go, papa. He is the younger—he will come back safe to us."

She uttered the words clearly, without the least faltering. The young man rose and thanked her.

"Herr Major," said he, "I want to leave to-night by the mail-train for Calais. I have no money. Burgess the picture-dealer owes me twenty-five pounds. Give me twenty-five pounds, and I will leave with you a note authorizing you to get it from him."

"But why to-night?" said the Major and Marie in a breath.

"Because I am anxious to get away. Besides, shall I not require some time to get accustomed to Prussian drill, where it differs from our volunteer customs?"

"But," said Kirschenfeld, "you cannot step into the Prussian army in a moment. It needs influence, Junge. I must write you one, two, three letters to my friends in Berlin, to get you *Protektion*, and see you safe into your corps."

"You can write these letters now," said Charlie, with a sudden imperiousness, "while I go to settle my affairs at home. If you would lend me your cab for two or three hours, I should be able to see one or two people to whom I must say good-bye."

The Major rang the bell, and gave the necessary directions. In the meantime, Marie persuaded Charlie to have some lunch.

"I will send your man back when I have done with the cab."

"Shall we not see you again?" said Marie, in some alarm.

"If you like to come to the station——" he said; and then somehow he fancied he would rather have no one there.

However it was finally arranged that the Major and Marie should go to see him off; and that then Charlie should be provided with all the necessary funds and letters for the journey. Then he left.

"He is already beginning to walk like a man," said the old soldier, as he saw Charlie pass across the pavement to the cab; but Marie caught that brief glimpse of him, and followed the cab until it was out of sight, with far other and sadder feelings.

CHAPTER XV.

GOODBYE!

CHARLIE'S first business was to settle a few matters at his lodgings; but the final disposition of what little property he possessed there he resolved to leave in his uncle's hands. His principal care now was with that mournful bundle of letters which he had read through on the previous afternoon.

These he flung into the grate, along with the note he had written to the Major that morning, and, having set fire to them, he stood for some minutes and watched the blue flame slowly steal round the

envelopes and leap up in orange tongues when it found a stray leaf. Once or twice he saw some word, or sentence, or even some well-known address that he felt an instinctive desire to pluck out from the seething mass of red and black, but again the determination to have done now and for ever with these fatally magical letters restrained him. No purpose of his was worth a straw so long as it was possible for him to read those sheets, which for many a year had wound him round as with an evil charm. So he thought; and yet, when he turned away from the grate, now full of crisp and blackened ashes, it was with a secret dread of his own precipitancy.

The Major's cab still stood below. When he had filled his bag with some few necessaries, and taken a coat over his arm, he descended, and called his landlady. He

told her that he was going away, that his uncle would call next day and arrange about the things he had left, and pay her the month's warning which was in their agreement. Then he got into the cab, and bade the man drive to a certain street on the south side of the river.

In about half an hour Charlie was opposite Glencairn's house. Not during all this day had he been so agitated. But he gave himself no time to think. He went up the steps, knocked at the door, and was at once admitted by the girl, who knew him. Mr. Glencairn, she said, was upstairs.

Charlie himself opened the door. He had fancied, from what the girl had said, that Glencairn was alone; but the first person he saw was Fanny, who rose. She seemed alarmed by the very look of his face; and yet she came forward to shake

hands with him. He turned away from her, and, seeing Glencairn near the fire, said,

"I thought you were alone, Mr. Glencairn. Can I see you for a moment—anywhere—by yourself?"

"Won't you sit down, Charlie?" said the old man, kindly.

"I—I am going abroad to-night. I cannot wait—will you speak with me in your study?"

Glencairn rose, but seemed unwilling to go into that room, which he had not entered for several months.

"Will you come outside? For God's sake, do—I cannot wait!"

He turned, and walked through the room, Glencairn following. He did not look at Fanny. She sat, as if petrified, in her chair, looking with stolid, frightened eyes after him.

"Going abroad?" said her mother, with a cold smile, when he had gone; "perhaps living upon ten shillings a week is pleasanter there."

The two men were now in the street, which was sufficiently quiet and dark at this period of the afternoon.

"You are going abroad, Charlie?"

"Yes. I am going into the Prussian service. Shall I tell you why? Or shall I tell you what kept me so long in England, when I had many a chance of going abroad. I dare say you know. I might have gone into commerce, but that I always fancied I should, by a lucky turn in my profession, arrive sooner at the income which would have warranted me in asking Fanny to be my wife. She knows that it is for her sake I have been working these two or three years back—thinking only of her, careless of everything but her. And I

suppose I might have gone on working until Doomsday, and she would have continued her deceit, and tried to maintain a false semblance of affection—and women can do that easily, it seems—had I not made the discovery in time. In time?—well, my life is not over yet, but the best part of it is gone, and she has ruined the rest."

"What discovery, Charlie? Surely you must have some ground for accusing Fanny in this way."

"Some ground!" he cried, with a bitter laugh; "you would not fancy it by looking at her, would you?—oh, I tell you, women have wonderful faces. They will kiss you and smile into your eyes, while they are feeling where to put a dagger into your throat. They will swear, on their soul, on their Bible, on their mother's grave, eternal affection to you,

and the moment your back is turned they will give themselves to the man whose money or whose lust attracts them most. They will——"

"You forget," said Glencairn, with some dignity, "that you have made a charge against my daughter."

"You want to hear it? Would to God I could spare you the blow. But sooner or later you must hear what I have to say, and it is better you should hear it now, and from me. You and I, Mr. Glencairn, are old friends. I could not have left England to-night without seeing you; for I may not return to see you again."

"But about Fanny, Charlie—you have nothing to say against her? You will part good friends with her too?"

"With her—when she is now the voluntary mistress of Christian Helstone!"

The old man turned, as if he had received a slap in the face.

"You say that to me, of my daughter?"

"I know it to be true. I tell you she goes there every morning, and many an afternoon, and many a night. It was his own housekeeper—your old servant, Miguel—who implored me to tell you, that she might no longer be guilty of being a party to this infamous compact. Yesterday morning I saw Fanny in his house; this morning I heard her singing there; to-morrow morning, if you go up Larkhall Lane, you will see her enter alone, and come out alone."

"You must be either drunk or mad," said Glencairn, "to come to me with such ravings. What nonsense is this you talk of Larkhall Lane, when the man you speak of lives in the Temple?"

"He does not live in the Temple. He

removed from the Temple months ago; but it was not considered necessary by your wife and daughter that you should know that."

"You accuse my wife, also? And you do this because I am an old man, because I cannot strike you. That is very noble of you. If I were a younger man, I should knock you down—you know it,—and it is very generous and honourable of you to come and tell me these abominable lies and slanders, when you are aware that you can do so in safety. And now you have struck the blow, are you satisfied? Will you go? You see, I am not much moved by it;—it is you who should be moved by it—who should be covered with shame by it!"

He turned and walked back to the house, leaving Charlie overwhelmed with remorse and pain.

"There goes the last link that held me to the family," he said; "and now I can leave England without regret."

That evening he was at London Bridge Station; and the Major and Marie were there. They had got admittance to the platform, and were walking up and down, talking to Charlie. The Major had much counsel to give; and Marie scarcely spoke.

"You are very dull, Marie," said Charlie; "you sent me on this mission, you know, and you should not have any forebodings about it just yet."

She evidently tried to pluck up her spirits from that moment. Her father was telling Charlie about the blunders which most recruits make; and she laughed—rather nervously, I think—over these little jokes.

"TAKE YOUR SEATS, PLEASE!" cried the

guard. And who does not remember the horror of these few words in certain circumstances ?

Kirschenfeld grasped the young man's hand, and said, fervently,

"Auf Wiedersehen, mein braver Junge ! "

"And you know, Charlie," said Marie, with a pitiable smile struggling through the moisture that gathered before her eyes; "you know you must come back an officer—for—for the Prussian uniform is very handsome, you know; and we shall expect you to come home to us as soon—as soon as ever the war is over. And you will not get into any—danger——"

She could get no further. A quick sob broke her utterance, and then she fairly burst into tears; and her face was hidden from him as the train rolled slowly out of the station.

"My girl," said Von Kirschenfeld, clearing his throat in a savage way, "come home. Why did you send him instead of me?"

END OF VOL. II.

WYMAN AND SONS, PRINTERS, GREAT QUEEN STREET, LONDON, W.C.

00075478

Digitized with financial assistance from the
Government of Maharashtra
on 18 July, 2018